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# **Contextualising Parenting within a Needs Theory Framework: A Qualitative Study**

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requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Psychology

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## ABSTRACT

Parenting plays a fundamental role in shaping a child's future. As such, understanding parenting processes is essential for the prevention of adverse outcomes for children and the promotion of competent child and adult functioning. The motivational processes that mothers employ within the context of parenting are not well understood. This study attempted to gain insight into parenting by exploring how a mother's psychological needs may be dramatized within the mother-child relationship. The research explores motivational forces relating to parenting by describing mothers' experiences of being a parent and interpreting the descriptions within the Needs Theory Framework of Murray (1938). Three selected mothers took part in a qualitative enquiry. A semi-structured, three-phase interview process was used, which combined life-history interviewing and focussed in-depth interviewing.

Results of the thematic analysis indicated that the mother-child relationship is experienced as a highly valued means of fulfilling the mother's need for relatedness, and that mothers experience a strong need to nurture and protect their offspring. A variety of conflicting needs may be experienced by mothers within their relationships with their children. The degree of difficulty experienced by a mother in a specific aspect of parenting may relate to the complexity of interacting and conflicting needs. Mothers experience a strong desire to prevent replication of negative past experiences with their children, with the underlying need being to nurture the child and protect the child from distress. A particular unmet need in the mother's past may shape the development of a consistent pattern of interaction dramatized within the mother-child relationship. Subconscious emotional needs may unconsciously shape a mother's spiritual convictions, which in turn shape parent-child interaction. Finally, a mother may vicariously fulfil her need for recognition, affirmation and achievement through her children.

Further research is needed to explore the various complex expressions of the mother's needs within the mother-child relationship as well as related subconscious processes, in order to gain greater insight into underlying motivation within the context of parenting.

*This dissertation is in loving memory of my dad, and is dedicated to my husband, David, my children, Brennan and Ashton, and my mum, Margaret.*



I extend my deep appreciation to  
Leon, Johann and Feroza, for their insight and support, and  
the mothers who took part in the study, and breathed life into the work.

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# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

*"You don't really understand human nature unless you know why a child on a merry-go-round will wave at his parents every time around - and why his parents will always wave back."*

*(Tammeus, n.d.)*

### 1.1 Motivation

Parent-child relationships and parenting processes influence multiple aspects of a child's development such as self-esteem, aggressive behaviour, susceptibility to depression and cognitive development (Waylen & Stewart-Brown, 2010). Warm, supportive parenting is related to positive cognitive, behavioural, emotional and physical child outcomes (Alegre & Benson, 2010; Atzaba-Poria & Pike, 2005; Barber, Stolz, & Olsen, 2005; Bernier, Carlson, & Whipple, 2010; Dallaire & Weinraub, 2005; Kanat-Maymon & Assor, 2010; Maughan & Moore, 2010). In contrast, harsh, abusive, and emotionally neglectful parenting is associated with emotional, behavioural, mental and physical health problems in childhood and adulthood (Benzies, Keown, & Magill-Evans, 2009; Perepletchikova & Kazdin, 2004; Reid, Patterson, & Snyder, 2002; Repetti, Taylor, & Seeman, 2002). As parenting plays an important role in shaping a child's future, understanding parenting processes is essential for the prevention of adverse outcomes for children, and the promotion of competent child and adult functioning.

Investigations into the forces that shape parenting have revealed numerous personal and contextual influences on parenting, ranging from modelling parenting practices experienced during childhood, to socio-economic status, to the bi-directional interaction between the parent and the child (Conley, Caldwell, Flynn, Dupre, & Rudolph, 2004). A literature search revealed that relatively little has been published on parenting in South Africa. The closest related topic that has received attention is motherhood, with studies in this area focussing on mothers and children at risk (Shefer, Boonzaier & Kiguwa, 2006).



This study aims to explore parenting within the context of psychological needs. The interest in psychological needs stems from a curiosity to explore how needs theory might apply to the dynamics of parenting and mother-child relationships. Psychological needs have been the focus of considerable research (Allen, 2003) and have consistently been shown to influence behaviour (e.g. Daugherty, Kurtz, & Phebus, 2009; Hofer, Busch, Chasiotis, & Kiessling, 2006; Kováčová & Sarmány-Schuller, 2006; Langner & Winter, 2001; Magee & Langner, 2008; Oleson & Henry, 2009; Schultheiss & Pang, 2007; Smith, 2008; Zurbriggen, 2000). The study aims to generate more insight into parenting by considering how a mother's psychological needs may play out and be dramatized within the parent-child relationship.

## 1.2 Problem statement

Research and theoretical formulations regarding the link between parents' psychological needs and parenting have mainly been approached from a psychodynamic and an attachment theory framework (e.g. Benedek, 1970a, 1970b, 1970c, 1973; Brazelton & Cramer, 1990; Cohler & Paul, 2002; Fraiberg, Adelson & Shapiro, 1975; Manzano, Espasa, & Zilkha, 1999; Rholes & Simpson, 2004; Scharf & Shulman, 2006). One of the problems of using psychodynamic theory in the study of parenthood is that this school of thought has focussed on offspring struggling with feelings about the remembered parents of early childhood rather than parenting from the perspective of the parents (Cohler & Paul, 2002). In addition, psychodynamic theory has its roots in exploring the son's triadic relationship with his parents and to a large extent, has focussed on the development of boys rather than on that of girls. A further dilemma is that psychoanalysis has made at best limited progress in understanding the psychological development of women, which adds to the problem of discussing parenthood among women (Cohler & Paul, 2002). In attachment theory, the concept of attachment refers to the motivational system of the infant to receive care, whereas care-giving referred to the motivational system of the parents to give care and protection (Mayseless, 2006). While the study of the attachment system has flourished, the study of the care-giving system has lagged behind (Ibid).

Research addressing specific needs, such as the need for power or affiliation, has been predominantly quantitative (e.g. Magee & Langner, 2008; Oleson & Henry, 2009; Schüler, Sheldon, & Fröhlich, 2010; Smith, 2008). According to Dix (2000) the motivational,

affective and cognitive processes that parents employ to manage complex and changing concerns that parents, children and others bring to family interaction are not well understood (Dix, 2000). To the researcher's knowledge, no studies have been conducted from a qualitative paradigm exploring numerous and specific psychological needs within the context of parenting.

### **1.3 Aims of the study and research question**

The study assumes that within the parenting relationship, mothers live out and dramatize their own needs. The study therefore aims to explore the mother's experience of parenting, and then interpret the description of these experiences and perspectives using the needs theory framework of Murray (1938). The research method allows for a rich and contextualised description of parenting, which may facilitate the emergence of themes and constructs that may or may not feature in any of the existing needs theories.

The research explored parenting within the context of psychological needs, taking a holistic and contextual view of parenting. The research was undertaken in order to answer the following questions:

- What are the major themes that emerged relating to mothers' experiences of parenting concerning the expression of their personal psychological needs?
- How can mothers' descriptions of the relationship between their psychological needs and parenting be interpreted in relation to the Needs Theory Framework of Murray (1938) (Murray & Schneidman, 1981)?

Understanding parenting within the context of psychological needs may provide the clinician with insight into parenting problems which could potentially translate into more effective therapeutic interventions and parental guidance. In addition, by taking a complex view of parental behaviour, professionals can develop understanding of and compassion for parents. Exploring parenting and psychological needs may facilitate increased self-awareness among mothers and enhance the mother's emotional growth and development. The findings of this study could contribute to evaluative judgements regarding the relevance of the dominant needs theories in psychology within a particular context.

## 1.4 Overview

The study is structured as follows: Chapter 1 introduces the research problem, the purpose and aims of the study and the research question. Chapter 2 provides an overview of parenting literature, focussing upon forces that shape parenting. Chapter 3 considers parenting from the perspective of the emotional needs of the parent. An overview of the concept of needs is provided, followed by a review of the literature addressing specific psychological needs. Murray's theory of needs (1938) (Murray & Schneidman, 1981) is outlined and critically discussed, and additional theory relating specifically to needs within the context of parenting is considered. Chapter 4 outlines the methods and procedures implemented for the thematic analysis. The results of the study are presented in chapter 5. Chapter 6 provides a discussion of the results in relation to the relevant literature. Chapter 7 discusses the limitations of the study, recommendations for future research and personal reflections.



## CHAPTER 2

### PARENTING

*"Once upon a time, parenting was a seemingly simple thing: Mothers mothered; Fathers fathered.*

*Today, parenting has many motives, many meanings, and many manifestations."*

*(Bornstein, 2002, p. xiv)*

This chapter serves as a brief overview of parenting literature, focussing upon forces that shape parenting. This chapter is based on the notion that human experience cannot be understood unless consideration is given to the context in which experiences occur. Exploring how the mother's needs may be expressed within mother-child relationships requires a broad understanding of the complexity of the forces that shape parenting, and how needs may be interconnected with multiple areas of influence. This chapter therefore contextualises the needs of the mother within the broader context of parenting influences. The literature review begins with an overview of the concept of parenting, followed by a discussion of the forces that shape parenting.

#### 2.1 The concept of parenting

For decades parenting was generally defined as mothering (Parke, Dennis, Flyr, Morris, Leidy, & Schofield, 2005). This limited definition of parenting was due to a number of factors, including assumptions about the central role of mothers in care-giving, the presumed inadequacy and lack of interest of fathers, and historically the relatively larger breadwinning capacity afforded to fathers. Holden (2010) considers how parenting is often undertaken by people other than the biological mother, and describes parenting as involving multiple roles, including protecting, loving, disciplining, structuring, and monitoring behaviour and well-being. The implication is that parenting is not a single generic activity, but one made up of numerous elements involving every aspect of the child's functioning. To add to the complexity, parenting is a rapidly evolving endeavour (Utting & Pugh, 2004). Demographic

and social changes affecting families include influences such as an increase in cohabitation outside marriage, postponement of parenthood, higher divorce rates, diversification of family structures, and more mothers in paid work.

Parenting has been conceptualised in different ways at different times. As noted by Flouri (2008), different scholars have emphasised different components of parenting, depending upon their specific area of investigation. For example, Darling and Steinberg (1993), who investigated parenting styles, argued for distinguishing three aspects of parenting, namely goals, styles and practices. Sigel and McGillicuddy-De Lisi (2002) argue that beliefs should also be considered as a distinct component of parenting. Theorists such as Bowlby (1969/1982), Ainsworth (1969), Winnicot (1965) and Bowen (1966) have played an important role in highlighting the importance of care-giving within the parent-child relationship and directing attention to the quality of the care-giving environment. Berg-Nielsen, Vikan, and Dahl (2002) suggest a relatively inclusive definition and describe parenting as consisting of “parental everyday behaviour towards offspring including parents’ cognition, emotions and attributions toward their child, as well as parenting attitudes and values” (Berg-Nielsen *et al.*, 2002, p. 531).

An in-depth understanding of what it means to parent is informed by an awareness of the ecologies in which parenting takes place (Bornstein, 2002). Ecological views are based on systemic thinking and consider how different circumstances or contexts contribute to parenting. The systemic perspective takes into account the complex interactions among different elements within the parenting context and recognises how parents are embedded in, influence, and are themselves affected by larger social systems. (The systemic perspective will be considered in greater detail in the following section.) Recognising the importance of systemic, contextual influences and processes in parenting is demonstrated in Lerner, Rothbaum, Boulos, & Castellino’s (2002, pp. 315-316) discussion of the concept of parenting. These writers argue that “Parenting involves bidirectional relationships between members of two (or more) generations, can extend through the respective lifespans of these groups, may engage all institutions within a culture (including educational, economic, political and social ones), and is embedded in the history of a people.” The discussion of Lerner *et al.* highlights the complexity of parenting, pointing to the importance of recognising contextual influences, reciprocal patterns of interaction and multiple processes in parenting.

To date, no definitive, consensual, and all-inclusive definition of parenting has emerged. In terms of the current study, parenting is perceived as a complex phenomenon relating to caregiving and the interaction between a parent and a child, which is informed by a contextual understanding of human experience and behaviour. Moreover, parenting is a subjective experience endowed with individual meanings which are shaped over a lifetime. This view of parenting is consistent with a qualitative paradigm and consequently contextualizes the current study, which seeks to explore the complexity of experiences and behaviour.

Having considered the concept of parenting in relation to the current study, the following section discusses the forces that shape parenting.

## **2.2 Forces that shape parenting**

Why do parents act the way they do? A growing body of research, which will be discussed in this section, points to multiple influences that shape parenting. Current models of parenting reflect ecologically based views, multidimensional paradigms, and joint contributions of both parents and children (Conley *et al.*, 2004). Recognizing the complexity of numerous, interconnected forces is important for informing people's thinking about parenting. In this section, the multiple influences that shape parenting will be outlined.

The organisation of this section is based on the conceptual model of Belsky (1984) of the determinants of parenting (which is discussed later in this section), and is structured in terms of four headings: the systemic perspective, contextual influences, child characteristics and parent characteristics.

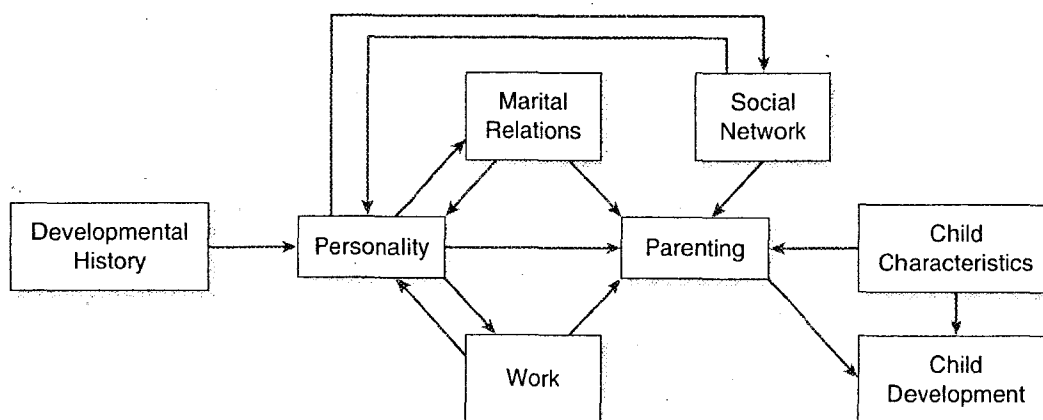
### **2.2.1 The Systemic Perspective**

Bronfenbrenner (1979) developed a theoretical model that was intended to recognise how behaviour is affected by multiple levels of context. His ecological perspective, which is based on systems theory, focuses on the person, the environment, and the continuous interaction of the person and environment. The framework he proposed enabled an examination of the multiple effects and interconnectedness of social elements in an environment. The elements examined range from macro-level influences such as living in

poverty, to micro-level processes such as dealing with daily stresses and strains, and include socio-cultural factors such as ethnicity and social class. The model of Bronfenbrenner (1979) assists with understanding the complexity of parenting by pointing to the need to adopt a multidimensional approach to conceptualisations of parenting.

Drawing on the work of Bronfenbrenner (1979), Belsky (1984) advanced a process model of the determinants of parenting (see Figure 3.1) which depicted how some determinants of parenting work together (Luster & Okagaki, 2005). He argued that parenting is determined by three general sources of influence: the parent's psychological resources or personality, the child's individual characteristics, and contextual sources of stress and support. Each of these domains is said to influence childrearing quality, and consequently, child development. Of the three broad factors, Belsky (1984) maintains that the parent's personality is the most important influence. In addition, Belsky (1984) proposes that parents' psychological resources are shaped by their developmental histories, and that contextual factors such as work, marital relations, and social support have relations of reciprocal influence with parents' psychological resources.

*Figure 2.1 Belsky's model of the determinants of parenting (1984)*



While Belsky (1984) highlighted the complexity of parenting and the contextual influences within parent-child interactions, it has been argued that Belsky's model fails to take into account all the ways that determinants mutually influence each other (Holden, 2010). Note how some of the arrows in his model go in one direction only, depicting a linear

understanding of influence rather than a circular or reciprocal process. In addition, his model ignores a number of determinants of childrearing (Holden, 2010). For example, in terms of more immediate or proximal influences, Belsky's model omits situational influences and transient parental qualities such as mood or illness. Considering more distant or distal determinants, Belsky's model doesn't refer to influences such as the parent's cultural background or socioeconomic status. Nevertheless, the model provides a useful framework for organising essential determinants of parenting and their interrelations (Holden, 2010).

In this study, the model of Belsky (1984) serves as a framework for organising the discussion of the factors that shape parenting, i.e. parent characteristics, child characteristics and contextual influences. At the same time, his theory highlights the importance of considering multiple contexts and influences upon parenting.

Having considered the multiple effects and interrelatedness of social elements that shape parenting, the following sections discuss specific influences upon parenting, namely contextual influences, child characteristics and parent characteristics.

### 2.2.2 Contextual influences



Contextual determinants refer to features in the environment that influence parenting. Aspects of the environment that impact upon parenting include culture, religion, socioeconomic status, family structure, stress and social support (Holden, 2010). Each of these aspects will be reviewed briefly. The discussion is short, as the aim is to broadly sketch influences on parenting so as to raise awareness of aspects of influence that may be interconnected with the emotional needs of the mother.

#### 2.2.2.1 Culture

Culture refers to the shared systems of meaning in and through which humans live (Spicer, 2010). Parenting is both influenced by, and a reflection of, context and culture (Bornstein, 2002). Cultural traditions can influence parenting through their influence of family structure, living arrangements, childrearing practices, and beliefs and attitudes about the roles of children at different ages and stages (Harkness & Super, 2002). Sleeping arrangements, for example, such as whether or not parents share a bed with their child, are likely to reflect the habits and customs of the parents' culture (DeLoache & Gottlieb, as cited in Australian



Institute of Family Studies, 2007). Similarly, the time parents spend soothing their child with close physical contact is also likely to be influenced by culture (Webb, as cited in Australian Institute of Family Studies, 2007).

In addition to culture, religion is another contextual factor that may shape parenting. Religion is discussed in the next section.

#### *2.2.2.2 Religion*

There is a paucity of academic literature on the influence of religion on parenting (Frosh, 2004). Nevertheless, there is some evidence of the significance of religious influences upon parent-child interaction. For instance, an exploration of the culture of American 'conservative Protestantism' revealed that religious values are an important predictor of child-rearing attitudes and practices (Wilcox, 1997). Conservative Protestant parents tended to maintain strict discipline and also demonstrated a particularly warm and expressive style of parent-child interaction. Mahoney, Pargament, Tarakeshwar, and Swank (2002) reviewed 94 studies published in journals since 1980 on religion and parental functioning. The study revealed that greater Christian conservatism was modestly related to greater endorsement and use of corporal punishment with pre-adolescents. It appears that for those who adhere to a religious faith, religious beliefs may have a significant effect on child-rearing practices.

In addition to religion and culture, socioeconomic status has also been shown to influence parenting, as is discussed in the next section.

#### *2.2.2.3 Socioeconomic status*

Socioeconomic status (SES) refers to the rating of an individual's status in society based on various social and economic indices, such as family background, social class, education of parents, education of self, occupation and income (Reber, Reber & Allen, 2009). SES is a major source of both direct and indirect influence on parenting (Leyendecker, Harwood, Comparini, & Yalçinkaya, 2005). For instance, home learning environment, access to schools and education, neighbourhood safety, quality of nutrition, parenting styles, underlying parenting beliefs and long-term socialisation goals are all linked to the economic resources that are available to the parents. As such, children's academic achievement, cognitive abilities, health and socio-emotional functioning have been found to vary according to their parents' SES (Ibid).

A review of the literature on parenting and its relation to SES suggests that, on average, lower-SES parents are more concerned that their children conform to societal expectations, and they create a home environment in which it is clear that parents have authority over children (Hoff, Laursen, & Tardif, 2002). Hoff, Laursen, and Tardif (2002) note that lower-SES parents also tend to be punitive when their authority is challenged. In addition, in everyday interaction with their children, lower-SES parents are more directive of their children's behaviour and less conversational than are higher-SES parents. In contrast, higher-SES parents are more concerned that their children develop initiative and they create a home atmosphere in which children are nearly equal participants (Ibid). Rules are discussed, as opposed to laid down, and the parents are less apt to be punitive, and less likely to resort to harsh physical punishment. In everyday interaction, higher-SES parents are less directive and more conversational than are lower-SES parents. Although the review highlights correlates with SES, the authors note that no summary can do justice to the complexity of parenting and its relation to SES.

Crouter and McHale (2005) examined the characteristics of parents' occupations which may affect their patterns of childrearing and proposed three levels of consideration: work as a determinant of world views, work as posing opportunities and constraints on parenting, and work-family dynamics that focus on daily work experiences. Considering how work is a determinant of world views, work informs parents' thinking about how their environments operate, and the qualities required for success in these environments (Kohn cited in Crouter & McHale, 2005; Ogbù, 1981). These ideas consequently shape parents' values regarding characteristics that are important to encourage within their children. The characteristics of a parent's job also pose opportunities and constraints on parenting (Crouter & McHale, 2005). For example, some jobs provide informal support while others don't, which may or may not enable parents to engage in the parenting role more effectively. In terms of daily work experiences, there are daily fluctuations in work demands that shape the daily emotional state of the employee, which influences the parent's emotional state and consequently parent-child interactions.

This section has highlighted how SES can shape parenting. In the following section, family characteristics that influence parenting will be discussed.

#### 2.2.2.4 *Family characteristics*

There are two primary family characteristics that have been found to influence parenting, namely family structure and marital relations (Holden, 2010). These characteristics are briefly discussed in this section.

A key feature of *family structure* that influences parenting is whether the family is a single or two-parent unit. For example, there is some evidence that single parents spend less time with their children and give their children less attention when compared to two-parent families (Weinraub, Horvath, & Gringlas, 2002). The second family structure that influences parenting is the number of children in the home. By means of illustration, harsh corporal punishment has been associated with large family size (Alyahri & Goodman, 2008).

Erel and Burman (1995) reviewed the empirical research on links between *marital relations* and parenting by conducting a meta-analysis of 68 studies examining associations between marital quality and parenting. Marital quality was assessed in a variety of ways across studies, including both self-reported and observed measures of marital satisfaction, overt conflict and the strength of the marital alliance. Similarly, parenting was assessed with diverse measures, including global measures of quality, consistency between parents, satisfaction with parenting, covert control of children, harshness of discipline and within-parent consistency. The review revealed that most studies supported a spill-over effect in which positive or negative affect and behaviour flows from the marital relationship to the parent-child relationship. A study by Cowan (1992) revealed that father-daughter relationships were particularly at risk when the parent's marriage is in trouble during the early years of becoming a family.

The primary theoretical perspective underlying much of the research on the links between marriage and parenting is from Family Systems Theory (Grych, 2002). Lindahl and colleagues (Lindahl, Clements, & Markman, 1997) examined systemic processes by assessing family interaction prior to, and five years after, the birth of a child. The study revealed that mothers and fathers reporting higher levels of current marital conflict were more likely to triangulate children (triangulation refers to a process whereby conflict between parents is diverted or avoided by involving the child). Mothers and fathers reporting higher levels of current marital conflict were also more likely to involve their children in cross-generational

coalitions during a conflict resolution task. In contrast, greater unity was seen in families reporting greater marital satisfaction.

Of particular significance for this study is how systems theory suggests two reasons why marital and parenting quality may be inversely related (Grych, 2002). The first reason is that experiencing a lack of warmth or intimacy in the marital relationship may be interconnected with parents meeting their emotional needs by seeking a closer relationship with their child. Another possibility is that a difficult relationship between a child and one parent may lead the other parent to become more involved with the child in an effort to make up for the problematic relationship. Studies reporting a negative association between marriage and parenting provide support for each of these possibilities. For example, Engfer (as cited in Grych, 2002) found that mothers with considerable conflict in their marriages reported greater emotional involvement with their infants and were more protective of them. However, it should be noted that high scores on the measure of emotional involvement reflected inappropriate expectations about receiving love, comfort and affection from the child, and high scores on protectiveness reflected excessive anxiety about the health and well-being of their child. As such, the qualities measured do not necessarily reflect good parenting. Over-involved mothers were viewed by observers as less sensitive to their newborns, suggesting that this type of involvement reflected mothers' emotional needs rather than their children's.

Thus, systems theory can contribute to understanding how the needs of the parents may play out within parent-child interactions. More specifically, experiencing a lack of affection or intimacy in the marital relationship may lead parents to meet their emotional needs by seeking a closer relationship with their child. In such instances, the mother's over-involvement with the child may reflect the mothers' emotional needs rather than the child's. Triangulation is discussed further in the following chapter on needs (see 3.4.4).

This section highlighted how the contextual determinant of family characteristics can shape parenting. The following section considers how parenting may be influenced by parental stress.

#### 2.2.2.5 *Stress*

Stress is another factor that can influence parenting (Crnic & Low, 2002). More specifically, stressed parents tend to be less nurturing, supportive, patient and involved than parents who

are not stressed. In general, mothers who are highly stressed and lack social support have been found to display less supportive and responsive parenting and more controlling, harsh parenting behaviours (Crnic, Gaze, & Hoffman, 2005). A stressed or depressed mother is not as likely to be as sensitive or responsive to her child's needs as one who is not (Smith, 2010).

In addition to stress, social support has also been shown to influence parenting, as is outlined below.

#### *2.2.2.6 Social support*

Social support refers to all of the forms of support provided by other individuals and groups which help an individual to cope with life (Reber *et al.*, 2009). The review by Cochran and Walker (2005) of literature on parents' social networks revealed that assistance with child-care, unconditional emotional support and advice about discipline prove to be helpful to mothers. More specifically, support can reduce the effects of stress and promote better parenting. The main support for parents usually comes from their partners and manifests as emotional support and practical assistance (McHale, Khazan, Erera, Rotman, DeCoursey & McConnell, 2002).

This brief review of literature reveals that broad environmental factors such as culture, religion, socioeconomic status, family structure, stress and social support are interconnected with parenting practices. The following section considers child characteristics that influence parenting.

### **2.2.3 Child characteristics**

The characteristics of children can play a key role in influencing how their parents interact with them (Holden, 2010). The effects of temperament, age and gender will be briefly discussed, although other characteristics may be influential, such as physical characteristics, mood (Karraker & Coleman, 2005) and birth order (Holden, 2010).

#### *2.2.3.1 Temperament*

The child's temperament refers to the biologically rooted behavioural styles of the child (Holden, 2010). Temperament is usually described as encompassing individual differences in three broad areas: reactivity or negative emotionality (negative mood and/or intensely

negative reactions), self-regulation (control of attentional and emotional processes) and inhibition/ sociability (Sanson, Hemphill, & Smart, as cited in Karraker & Coleman, 2005). Much of the research on how children's temperament-driven behaviour influences parenting has focussed on temperament qualities that are difficult to manage (Karraker & Coleman, 2005). Findings have suggested that the challenges arising from parenting a temperamentally difficult child may cause many parents to invest minimal energy in parenting and emotionally withdraw from the relationship (Kingston & Prior, 1995; Morris, Silk, Steinberg, Sessa, Avenevoli, & Essex, 2002). However, studies have also indicated that in some cases, having children with difficult temperaments can lead the parent to develop skilful parenting behaviour (Belsky & Park, 2000; van Bakel & Riksen-Walraven, 2002).

The effect of a child's temperament upon parenting is mediated by numerous factors, including parent cognitions, such as beliefs, attitudes, values, perceptions, expectations, stereotypes, knowledge and desires (Holden, as cited in Karraker & Coleman, 2005). These cognitions occur in response to children's characteristics or behaviours, and subsequently the cognitions shape the parent's response. For example, one parent may consider a quiet, obedient child to be "good", while another parent would consider the same child to be lacking in assertiveness. Values placed on particular expressions of temperament are also embedded in broader influences such as culture (Putnam, Sanson, & Rothbart, 2002). For example, Western culture may place greater value upon extraversion, whereas Asian cultures place greater value upon reticence or constraint. It becomes apparent that a child can be exposed to different parenting, depending upon how the parent perceives and reacts to the child's temperament.

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#### 2.2.3.2 Age

Besides temperament, there is evidence that a child's age also influences parenting. Ageing brings changes in the child's abilities and emotional maturity. In response to the child's changing characteristics, parents interact with their children differently and show affection, communicate, discipline and provide care in different ways (Holden, 2010). For example, parental control seems to play an increasingly important role in models of adaptive parenting during late childhood, but control becomes less central to parenting during adolescence (Hetherington & Clingempeel, 1992).

### 2.2.3.3 Gender

Gender is another child characteristic that influences parenting (Karraker & Coleman, 2005; Mayseless, 2006). An investigation by Smetana and Daddis (2002) showed that parents displayed higher levels of monitoring and psychological control of adolescent girls when compared to adolescent boys. The review of research by Leaper (2002) relating to how the child's gender influences parenting revealed that boys are more likely to be encouraged to play, explore, and achieve than are girls.

This brief summary, while discussing just a small number of the studies undertaken, provides evidence that certain child characteristics may, indeed, elicit differential responding from parents.

The effects of child temperament, age, and gender upon parenting were briefly outlined in this section. In the following section, characteristics of the parent that may shape parenting are considered.

### 2.2.4 Parent characteristics

Parenting is shaped by forces related to the characteristics and experience of the parent. This section briefly reviews six aspects of the parent that influence parenting, namely biological factors, gender, personality, beliefs and cognitions about childrearing, and prior experiences of the parent.

#### 2.2.4.1 *The biology of parenting*

Certain aspects of parenting are interconnected with the biological makeup of human beings. Considering the roots of how parenting has evolved in biological terms, attention is turned to the contribution of evolutionary psychology, and its contribution to understanding influences that shape parenting. Evolutionary psychology is a broad approach to the study of psychology which aims to understand behaviours in their evolutionary contexts (Reber *et al.*, 2009). Although the approach focuses on genetic and biological constraints, it places more emphasis on the role of social and cognitive factors. Bjorklund and Younger (2001) provide an evolutionary view of human parenting. They argue that human psychological functioning, including parenting, can be best understood by taking an evolutionary developmental

perspective. They propose six principles of evolutionary developmental psychology in this regard.

The first principle is that an evolutionary account of behavioural or cognitive characteristics does not imply genetic determinism. Evolutionary psychologists argue that behavioural change occurs as a result of transactional relationships between an organism and its environment, and that the eventual behavioural phenotype of an organism is not predetermined by its genes. Development occurs as a result of the bidirectional relationship between all levels of biological and experiential factors. There is considerable plasticity in development, as the experiences of each individual are different.

The second principle is that there is a need for an extended childhood so that children can learn the complexities of human communities. Humans have an extended phase of immaturity when compared to other species. Bjorklund and Younger (2001) suggest that this extended period provides time for children to learn about the social complexity of human groups.

Thirdly, numerous aspects of youth evolved to serve as preparations for adulthood. For example, the origins of a multitude of sex differences observed in adulthood can often be traced to childhood. Such gender differences should not be viewed as a form of biological determinism. Rather, girls and boys are biased toward different environments and experiences through evolved epigenetic rules, and the extent to which children will develop in a fashion typical of their gender will be determined by the extent to which their environment supports those biases (Bjorklund, Younger, & Pellegrini, 2002).

Fourthly, there have been different selection pressures on organisms at different times in the development of the individual to maturity (Bjorklund & Younger, 2001). Although some aspects of infancy and childhood can be seen as preparation for later life, other features have been selected in evolution as an adaptive function at that time in development only, and not to prepare the child for later life. By way of illustration, some aspects of infancy may serve to foster the attachment between an infant and mother, so as to increase the chances of survival at that time in their life, and not only to prepare the child for later adult relationships. The authors propose that evolution does not only prepare children for a future environment, but provides them with many characteristics that make them adapt well to their immediate environments.



Fifth, many of humans' evolved psychological mechanisms are domain specific in nature and were selected to deal with relatively specific types of problems. For example, mechanisms that influence or affect the decisions that men and women make concerning how much to invest in their offspring, can be viewed as being honed over millions of years to deal with recurrent problems that our ancestors faced.

Sixth, not all evolved adaptations continue to be adaptive in modern times. For example, formal schooling represents a situation in which many of children's evolved tendencies do not fit well with the demands of modern society. From the perspective of evolutionary psychology, much of what we teach children in school is 'unnatural' in that teaching involves tasks never encountered by our ancestors.

In conclusion, the authors show that evolutionarily informed theory can assist in the pursuit of understanding many aspects of human behaviour, including parenting. Many aspects of parenting are considered to be influenced by evolutionary processes. Moreover, it is equally important to note that many characteristics of parenting and other human behaviours have developmental histories that can change the usual course of adult functioning. Thus, parenting behaviour may be best understood when considered from an evolutionary developmental psychological perspective.

Considering the physiological processes related to parenting, Corter and Fleming (2002) examined the interaction between psychological and physiological influences in the expression of maternal behaviour in human mothers. They uncovered the sensory, hormonal and neural factors that regulate parental behaviour in human beings. These authors outline how many of the fundamental functions that human parents serve for their infants, such as feeding, protection, thermo-regulation and grooming, are common to other species, and highlight how this suggests that biological factors may be important in human parenting. The authors note that research findings that document cultural universals in parenting are also consistent with the likelihood that biology plays a part in parenting. Such universals have been found, for example, in the communicative adjustments adults make in vocalising and singing to their infants. Common qualities of voice tone in infant-directed singing have been noted in various cultures. Corter and Fleming (2002) further provide a systems perspective on physiological factors in maternal behaviour, with reference to interactional reciprocity

between mother and infant, as well as consideration of possible concordance in mechanisms that control the behaviour of each partner.

This brief summary of studies provides evidence that aspects of parenting are interconnected with the biological make-up of human beings. In the next section, how the gender of the parent may shape parenting is briefly discussed.

#### 2.2.4.2 *Gender*

There is evidence that the gender of the parent plays a part in shaping parenting (Holden, 2010). By way of illustration, various studies document that fathers often have the role of playmates, in contrast to mothers, who give more attention to care-giving (Parke, 2002). Mothers and fathers also differ in their child-rearing attitudes, with mothers seeing greater importance in expressive issues such as emotions and intimacy, when compared to fathers who place more value on self-control, achievement and responsibility (Holden & Buck, 2002). In addition, fathers tend to spend less time with their children when compared to mothers. Fathers spend 67% as much time with their children during weekdays when compared to mothers (Yeung, Sandberg, Davis-Kean, & Hofferth, as cited in Cabrera, Tamis-LeMonda, Bradley, Hofferth, & Lamb, 2000).

Although there is evidence that gender plays a part in shaping parenting, it is important to recognise that gender is embedded within a broader social context which includes community and cultural influences (Parke *et al.*, 2005). These influences, in turn, shape how gender influences parenting.

This section outlined the influence of parent gender upon parenting. In the next section, how the personality of the parent may shape parenting is considered.

#### 2.2.4.3 *Personality*

Personality is considered to play an important role in shaping parenting. In this section, the contribution of psychodynamic theory to the study of personality and parenting will be considered, and the major facets of adult personality and their connections to parenting are discussed.

Early thinking on the relationship between a parent's personality and parenting behaviour came largely from psychodynamic theory (Belsky & Barends, 2002). Psychodynamic research proposed theories of the development of personality structure, and wanted to understand ways in which such development could be unsuccessful in early childhood and result in psychopathology. A central view of many of these theories was that the parent's personality determined the nature of parenting and consequent child development (Belsky & Barends, 2002). Attention was focussed mainly on pathological aspects of parental character and ways in which these factors gave rise to child psychopathology. Of particular relevance for this study is the significance that psychodynamic theory placed on the needs of the parent. According to Holden and Buck (2002), the common theme among these psychodynamic theorists was that if parents' emotional needs had not been sufficiently met during their own development, then these unresolved needs would manifest in their parenting behaviour. In a similar vein, the assumption was that if parents had adaptive and flexible personalities, their interaction with their children would be constructive.

The review by Belsky and Barend (2002) of modern research on personality and parenting shows that personality has a significant influence upon parenting. Individuals who are psychologically healthy and mature and, more specifically, low in neuroticism, high in extraversion and agreeableness, high in openness to experience and conscientiousness, as well as high in self-esteem, and characterised by an internal locus of control, are likely to be good parents. This is because these kinds of individuals have been repeatedly found to provide care that is more supportive, sensitive, responsive and intellectually stimulating. The authors do however note that virtually all of the research reviewed was conducted in the United States, which raises the question of whether the relations between personality and parenting discerned in the literature are appropriate for various cultural contexts.

Traditionally, personality theorists have argued that individuals' traits constitute the primary determinants of behaviour. The focus was mainly upon internal forces, relating to individual differences in thoughts, feelings and motivations, which were considered as located within the person. Currently, personality is seen as both a product of the environment, and as a simultaneous determinant of the environment (Belsky & Barends, 2002).

Belsky (1984) assigned personality a central role in filtering socio-contextual influences on parenting. More specifically, he argued that the impact of marriage, work, social support and

developmental history on parenting are, in part, mediated by their effects on individual psychological functioning (Vondra, Sysko, & Belsky, 2005). Vondra, Sysko, and Belsky (2005) argue that personality and adjustment are in some sense the most proximal determinants of parenting, and consider the parent's psychological functioning as the primary player among a host of contextual factors that affect parenting.

Bogensneider, Small, and Tsay (1997) examined the model of Belsky (1984) of the determinants of parenting among 666 pairs of white mothers and adolescents and 510 pairs of white fathers and adolescents. In contrast to Belsky's assertion that parental attributes function as the most powerful determinant of parenting, Bogenschneider and co-workers note that child characteristics, followed by stress and/or support, appear most influential with this adolescent population. Nevertheless, there is some support for the prominence of parent personality as a determinant of parenting (e.g. Clark, Kochanska, & Ready, 2000; Kochanska, Friesenborg, Lange, & Martel, 2004; Morse, 2011). Findings from the study by Smith (2010) of multiple determinants of parenting also revealed partial support for parent personality predicting parenting behaviours above and beyond the variance accounted for by child effects and contextual sources of stress and support. Smith's study indicated that the process of understanding individual differences in maternal parenting behaviours is complex, and that continued research is needed to fully understand how different factors relate to our understanding individual differences in parenting behaviours.

In this section, parent personality and its connections to parenting were discussed. The following section considers how parental beliefs and cognitions shape parenting.

#### 2.2.4.4 *Parental beliefs and cognitions*

Parental social cognition has been shown to affect parental behaviour (Holden, 2010). To date, a number of different cognitive constructs have been investigated such as attitude, attributions, beliefs, perceptions and expectations. Research pertaining to each of these constructs will be discussed in turn.

Parental beliefs are ideas or knowledge that parents deem to be accurate or true (Sigel & McGillicuddy-De Lisi, 2002). Research on parental beliefs has included parent's ideas about many aspects of parenting, such as childrearing strategies, child development, and parent-child relationships (Okagaki & Bingham, 2005). A number of research studies document the

relationship between parental beliefs and behaviours (Machida, Taylor & Kim, 2002; Sigel & McGillicuddy-De Lisi, 2002; Tudge, Hogan, Snezhkova, & Etz, 2000). Research by Machida, Taylor and Kim (2002) revealed that maternal self-efficacy beliefs were significantly related to more frequent involvement in home learning activities with the child.

Attitudes build on beliefs by adding an evaluative dimension, which is either a negative or positive tendency, to ideas about the object of the attitude (Holden & Buck, 2002). Much of the research on the relations between parents' attitudes and their behaviours has focussed on either parenting style or the quality of the home environment. Research has revealed correlations between parents' attitude and parenting behaviour (Okagaki & Bingham, 2005). For example, in a study aiming to understand factors that enhance empathic parenting behaviours, parent's childrearing attitudes were found to be critical to the parent's ability to engage in empathic parenting behaviours (Morse, 2011). The study by Holden, Coleman, and Schmidt (1995) showed that the best predictor of spanking behaviour is a positive attitude about spanking. Parents who are concerned that spoiling is not good for a child may believe that responding quickly to the cries of an infant will make the child too dependent on the parent, and ultimately place the child at risk for the development of behaviour problems (Burchinal, Skinner, & Reznick, 2010). These studies highlight how parental attitudes are interconnected with parent-child interactions.

Attributions refer to causal assumptions about behaviour (Holden, 2010). The attributions that a parent makes about a child's behaviour serve as interpretative filters that give meaning to the child's behaviour, and guide the parent's affective and behavioural reactions to the child (Johnston & Ohan, 2005). Parents can respond to identical social stimuli in different ways, depending on the causal inferences they draw. A crying baby, believed to be tired, may gain parental sympathy, whereas the same infant behaviour may provoke parental irritation or even anger if the parent assumes that the crying is a selfish demand for attention. Attributions can refer to issues such as the relative roles of nature and nurture in development, the degree to which parents can influence their children, and the ingredients involved in school success (Miller, 1995). Research on parental attributions has primarily been conducted in the context of understanding child abuse (Okagaki & Bingham, 2005). For example, a consistent connection has been observed between parents' attributions and their harshness or maltreatment of children (Azar, 2002). It has been demonstrated that when parents see child

misbehaviour as intentional or dispositional, they respond with more negative affect and harsher discipline (Johnston & Ohan, 2005).

Bugental and Happaney (2002), in reviewing the research on parental attributions, discuss the differences between controlled and automatic processes. Parents may or may not be aware of their automatic attributions. When automatic attributions are in accord with reality, they may lead to appropriate parenting behaviour, but when they are not in accord with reality, it may be more difficult for parents to behave appropriately.

As with other influences that shape parenting, the actual relations among child behaviour, parental attributions, and parenting reactions are recognized to be multiple, complex, and transactional in nature (Johnston & Ohan, 2005).

Perceptions are a type of belief which refers to ideas about the attributions, characteristics and behaviours that an individual develops about a particular person or social group (Okagaki & Bingham, 2005). In the parenting literature, most of the attention has focussed on parents' perceptions of children's characteristics and perceptions of their own childrearing ability (Okagaki & Bingham, 2005). Parents appear to adapt their childrearing strategies to account for their perceptions of their child's abilities or special needs (Okagaki & Bingham, 2005). In families with developing children, researchers have examined the ways in which childrearing changes according to the developmental needs of the child. For example, research has revealed that parents of adolescents often adopt a more flexible parenting style in order to cope with their perceptions of their child's changing development needs (Cicognani & Zani, 1998).

Parental goals and expectations refer to the outcomes that parents hope to achieve when they interact with or socialise their child (Okagaki & Bingham, 2005). Relatively little research has assessed directly the relation between parents' goals and expectations and their behaviours, and strong relations between goals and behaviour have not been found (Okagaki & Bingham, 2005).

Sigel and McGillicuddy-De Lisi (2002) propose that parents' social cognitions do not operate as separate, distinct factors that have a linear effect on parenting. Instead they are considered to be interrelated, with some social cognitions acting together to direct behaviour, or one

cognition moderating another. In addition, researchers (Daggett, O'Brien, Zanolli, & Peyton, 2000; Goodnow, 2002) have begun to deliberate how parents' social cognitions develop over time. Daggett, O'Brien, Zanolli, and Peyton (2000) have suggested that when individuals first become parents, their beliefs and attitudes about childrearing are largely informed by childhood experiences with their own parents. Over time and through further experience in childrearing they may refine their initial beliefs and acquire new ideas and attitudes related to parenting. It is also important to consider the ways in which broad contextual factors may shape beliefs, attitudes, perceptions, attributions and expectations relevant to child rearing and parent-child relationships (Okagaki & Bingham, 2005).

This section considered how different parent cognitive constructs such as attitude, attributions, beliefs, perception and expectations can shape parenting. The following section discusses how parenting may be influenced by prior experiences of the parent.

#### *2.2.4.5 Prior experiences*

According to Holden (2010) there are at least three types of prior experiences that are particularly relevant in terms of shaping parenting: (i) experiences from the parent's own childhood, (ii) non-parenting experiences with other children, and (iii) previous parenting experiences.

*Experiences from the parent's own childhood* are believed to play a fundamental role in shaping parenting (Holden, 2010). The different ways in which parenting is influenced by childhood is discussed. Specific consideration is given to how experiences with one's own parents shapes parenting, with specific reference to the contributions from the psychodynamic perspective and attachment theory.

Harkness, Super, and Keefer (1992) considered the different ways in which parenting is influenced by experiences from childhood. They theorised that parenting is influenced by childhood in four ways. Firstly, a parent who identifies negative experiences in their childhood may set goals to actively avoid similar experiences with their own children. Secondly, parents who identify positive aspects of their childhood try to deliberately replicate the positive aspects. Thirdly, experiences and attitudes can be replicated without conscious thought, and fourthly, views about parenting are passed from generation to generation. Scharf and Shulman (2006) also note how parents may attempt to establish with their child the exact

opposite of the relationship they had with their own parent. For instance, parents' experience of a strict and controlling environment in their own childhood may be connected to reluctance to impose limits on the child, resulting in a lack of control and limit setting in the home. Snarey (1993) showed that fathering was a combined result of modelling the positive aspects of their fathers' parenting and reworking the negative aspects of the father-son relationship they had experienced.

Fraiberg et al., (1975), taking a psychodynamic perspective on how childhood experiences of being parented influence parenting, described a presentation of two case-studies with mothers. These studies revealed a repetition of the mother's own childhood conflicts in their interactions with their infants. The cases showed the pathological influence of relations from the mother's past. The history of the mother was marked by extremely painful experiences of rejection and seduction in the first case, and abandonment and physical violence in the second. The authors examined, in particular, the mechanism of identification with the aggressor, showing that the mother's aggression towards the infant was based upon the repression of painful affects experienced in the course of their own childhood experiences. Fraiberg *et al.* (1975) maintained that, although there is some distinction in the extent to which parents' own experiences of being parented interfere in an infants care, parents interact with their children in ways that are founded on a continuing emotionally haunting experience of an aggressive parent from their own childhood. The past tends to be repeated rather than resolved. Fraiberg *et al.* (1975) suggested that parents experience the pain of their childhood anew within their own experience of being a parent and caring for their children. Their study was entitled "Ghosts in the nursery" and will be referred to again in the following chapter, which provides a more detailed and specific exploration of parenting in relation to the psychological needs of the mother.

Taking a somewhat narrower view than the psychodynamic perspective on parenting, attachment theory focuses specifically on attachment relationships and how they are related to numerous maternal behaviours (Scher, Harel, Scharf, & Klein, 2006). Research on attachment theory has revealed links between a mother's perception of her own early attachment experience and the mother-child relationship (Bretherton & Munholland, 2008). A brief description of attachment theory is provided to illustrate the mechanisms underlying this process.



Bowlby (1969/1982, 1973) the founder of attachment theory, shared the psychodynamic view that early experiences in childhood have an important influence on development and behaviour later in life. He proposed that as a result of early attachment experiences within the infant-caregiver relationship, a child accumulates knowledge and develops a set of expectations, known as internal working models (IWMs) about self, significant others and the larger social world. For example, children whose parents are emotionally available and supportive develop models of themselves as competent and loveable, and models of others as loving and trustworthy. If a child usually receives warmth and comfort from a parent when they are injured, then the child will learn to turn to the parent when hurt. In contrast, children whose caregivers are inconsistent, rejecting or excessively demanding develop models of themselves as incompetent and unlovable, and models of others as unreliable, untrustworthy and unresponsive to their needs.

The bond with one's offspring, which is one of the most significant close relationships, is presumably guided by the internalised working model of closeness and care-giving, based on a parallel experience with one's own parents (Sharabany, Scher & Gal-Krauz, 2006). According to this premise, the attachment behavioural system shapes the care-giving system. For example, a mother with a fear of abandonment relating to her relationship with her own mother, might be more controlling and strict with her children. In contrast, a mother with little fear of being dependent might show a more relaxed and warm parenting style. Several studies support the view that early attachment experiences influence mother-child relationships (e.g. Bell & Richard, 2000; Bengtsson & Psouni, 2008; Daggett *et al.*, 2000; Ireland & Pakenham, 2010; Leerkes & Siepak, 2006; Lesnick-Oberstein, Koers, & Cohen, 1995; Millings & Walsh, 2009; Rudy & Grusec, 2006). For example, adults raised in punitive and controlling environments experience more hostility, negative attitudes and negative attributions toward their own children (Daggett *et al.*, 2000; Lesnick-Oberstein *et al.*, 1995).

A study by Leerkes and Siepak (2006) revealed that the way in which a mother responds to an infant's distress is most likely influenced by the way in which her own emotional needs were met by her own parents in her childhood. Consistent with an attachment theory framework, individuals whose emotional needs were not met in childhood, or who have insecure working models as adults, are less accurate at identifying infant emotions, more likely to make negative attributions about a distressed infant, and more likely to be amused or neutral in response to infant distress than others.

Mayseless (2006) notes that IWMs are resistant to change, although they can, in certain instances, be altered through exposure to new circumstances and experiences. Furthermore, attachment is only one component of the child-parent relationship, and as such it does not capture the complexity involved in parenting. In addition, most studies have examined only IWMs with respect to attachment, and have neglected to explore the multiple other parenting domains (Mayseless, 2006). See section 3.4.3 for a further discussion of attachment theory with specific reference to the emotional needs of the mother.

Although childhood experiences can influence parenting, moderating factors need to be taken into consideration. A study by Leerkes and Crockenberg (2006) showed that although parenting history in childhood predicts subsequent parental behaviour and related cognitions and emotions, intervening experiences may alter the nature of these associations for some mothers. More specifically, mothers with problematic histories with their own parents, who come to terms with these early difficulties through the support of a loving partner or by virtue of their own positive personality characteristics, are likely to recover personally and to parent effectively. Support for this finding is also offered by the study of Cowan (1992).

*Non-parenting experiences*, which refers to experiences of interacting with other children, is a second type of prior experience that may shape parenting. In most cultures, girls are more exposed to child-care experiences than boys. Research findings suggest that this exposure may play a part in why females, compared to males, are generally considered more proficient at childrearing (Holden, 1988).

Another type of prior experience, *previous parenting experiences*, involves learning from the experience of raising the firstborn child in a family. A study by Whiteman, McHale, and Crouter (2003) showed that experiences with earlier-born adolescents improved parents' interactions with, and parenting of, later-born adolescents. In their study, parents reported on the behaviour and the quality of interactions with firstborn teenagers and second-born teenagers. When parent-adolescent relationships were measured at the same age for both siblings, parents experienced less conflict with their second-born as compared to their firstborn adolescent offspring. These results suggest that parents may learn from their childrearing experiences (Whitman *et al.*, 2003).

This chapter provided a brief overview of parenting literature, focussing upon forces that shape parenting. The overview revealed that a comprehensive understanding of maternal parenting cannot be realised without a consideration of multiple determinants of parenting, and the way in which the different factors may relate to each other. It follows that exploring how the mother's needs may be expressed within mother-child relationships requires a broad understanding of the complexity of the forces that shape parenting, and the way in which the mother's needs may be interconnected with multiple areas of influence. The following chapter explores parenting specifically from the perspective of the emotional needs of the mother.



## CHAPTER 3

### NEEDS

“Although men are often *judged* by their deeds, they are better *understood* by their desires...”

(Stern, 1970)

This chapter considers parenting from the perspective of the emotional needs of the mother. The literature review begins with an overview of the concept of needs, followed by a review of the literature addressing specific psychological needs. The theory of needs of Murray (1938) (Murray & Shneidman, 1981) is then outlined and critically discussed. Finally, theory relating specifically to needs within the context of parenting and motherhood is considered.

#### 3.1 The concept of needs

In this section, various conceptualisations of needs are outlined and a working definition for the current study is proposed.

The term ‘need’ has been defined in various ways. Originally, the concept of needs was used in psychology to organise the study of motivation (Deci & Ryan, 2000). The concept described an internal motivational force which provided the basis for the impetus and direction of action. However, in the 1960s, a major shift towards cognitive theories led to the concept of needs being put aside and replaced by the concept of goals as the foremost concept in motivation (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Following the shift toward cognitive theories, many motivation theorists focussed on goal-related efficacy. Nevertheless, a number of motivational theorists (e.g. Deci & Ryan, 2000; Pyszczynski, Greenberg, & Solomon, 2000) maintain that an understanding of human motivation necessitates contemplation of the needs that give goals their psychological potency. In addition, theorists such as Blos (1983), Brazelton and Greenspan (2000), and Kernberg (1998), working within the psychodynamic paradigm, continued to explore underlying and often unconscious wishes and desires in order to understand the person (Palombo, Bendicson, & Koch, 2009).

The conceptualisation of the term 'need' varies widely among theorists. For example, some researchers (Becker, 1973; Freud, 1923/1961; Pyszczynski, Greenberg, & Solomon, 2000) consider needs to be primarily defensive in nature, and solely related to managing anxiety and reducing tension. Terror management theory (Pyszczynski, Greenberg, & Solomon, 1997; Pyszczynski, Greenberg, & Solomon, 2000) assumes that self-preservation is the root need for all other needs, and that the self-preservation instinct is the goal to which all behaviour is oriented. Other theorists (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Maslow, 1970) consider needs to be associated with growth and fulfilment. Deci and Ryan (2000), for example, proposed three basic human needs: autonomy, competence and relatedness. The authors maintain that "human needs specify the necessary conditions for psychological health or well-being and their satisfaction is hypothesized to be associated with the most effective functioning" (Deci & Ryan, 2000, p. 229).

Needs have been defined in various ways at the physiological and psychological levels and both as innate or learned. Maslow (1970), one of the most influential needs theorists, maintained that the source of human motivation resides in needs that are common to all human beings. His needs hierarchy, (see figure 3.1, p. 37), listing needs from strongest to weakest, include: basic physiological needs, safety needs, the need for belongingness and love, the need for esteem, and the need for self-actualisation. He argued that the basic physiological needs are associated with deficiency (e.g. a lack of safety creates a need for safety), and the higher order needs are associated with growth and striving towards actualisation of inherent potentialities (Franken, 2007). A limitation of Maslow's approach is that it overemphasises the individualistic nature of needs satisfaction and understates the importance of society, culture and the natural environment (Merrick, Andersen, & Ventegodt, 2003). In addition, there are many examples of needs higher in the hierarchy taking precedence over those said to have greater priority, such as people starving themselves for a cause (Pittman & Zeigler, 2007).

Figure 3.1: Maslow's hierarchy of needs



Murray (1938), whose needs theory will be used as a conceptual model for the interpretation of descriptions and themes that emerge from this study, addressed needs at the psychological rather than physiological level, and viewed needs primarily as acquired or learnt, rather than innate. In Murray's approach the concept of needs was broadly defined:

*"A need is a construct (a convenient fiction or hypothetical concept) that stands for a force (the physico-chemical nature of which is unknown) in the brain region, a force that organizes perception, apperception, intellection, conation and action in such a way as to transform in a certain direction an existing, unsatisfying situation" (Murray, 1938, pp. 123-124).*

One noteworthy aspect of this definition is that needs are functional in character, as they are identified with the purposes that an interaction serves for the individual.

Murray's research led him to formulate a list of 27 needs (see appendix A for a list of Murray's psychogenic needs). The length of the list of needs and the names of the needs vary, depending on the time-frame and the author. Murray's definition is very broad and suggests that anything that moves one to action is a need. In this way the concept of needs encompasses terms such as drive, motive, desire and goal. In his writings, Murray regularly used the term need and drive interchangeably (Allen, 2003). Murray's list of needs has been criticised for being too long, and recently there has been an emergence of interest in specifying a set of basic needs with the intent of providing a short list that would avoid the criticism that has been applied to Murray's list (Pittman & Zeigler, 2007).

A source of possible confusion lies in the various meanings that are intended when theorists use the term need. For the purpose of this research, a need is defined loosely as a motivational force which promotes behaviours to reduce tension and/or fulfil needs. This broad definition allows for comment upon all aspects of needs that emerge as themes within the thematic analysis of this study.

This section considered various conceptualisations of needs and provided a working definition for the current study. The following section provides a context for considering how specific needs may shape parenting by outlining potentially dominant psychological needs that shape behaviour, and reviewing research on specific needs.

### **3.2 Current research relating to specific psychological needs**

Researchers exploring motivation have speculated on the existence of a wide variety of needs, such as the need for self-preservation, autonomy, relatedness, control, order, achievement, power and esteem (e.g. Deci and Ryan, 2000; Maslow 1970; Murray 1938; Pyszczynski, Greenberg, and Solomon, 2000; Sheldon, Elliot, Kim, and Kasser, 2001; Stevens and Fiske 1995). This section discusses potentially dominant psychological needs that shape behaviour and briefly reviews some of the research on specific needs. The purpose of this section is to provide some context for considering how specific needs may shape parenting.

In considering whether there are a number of particularly essential human psychological needs, Stevens and Fiske (1995) undertook a literature review of a variety of writings on basic needs and motives. They argued that there was overall agreement on five basic needs: belonging, understanding, controlling, enhancing self and trusting. Fiske (2004) continued to elaborate on this set of needs, emphasising the social nature of human beings. A study by Sheldon, Elliot, Kim, and Kasser (2001) compared ten candidate psychological needs with the aim of determining which needs are the most fundamental. The participants described their most satisfying events within their lives and then rated the most relevant and significant of each of the ten candidate needs within these events. The results revealed that the four strongest psychological needs were self-esteem, relatedness, autonomy and competence. The basic pattern emerged within three different time-frames and within both American and South Korean samples. There has also been much recent empirical work that supports the self-

determination theory conception, which maintains that autonomy, competence and relatedness each make specific predictive contributions to many types of thriving and well-being outcomes (Sheldon & Gunz, 2009). Although there is no consensus regarding the most basic human psychological needs, it appears that self-esteem, relatedness, autonomy, competence, understanding, control and trust are important forces within the person.

Psychological needs have been the focus of extensive research and studies indicate that needs play a role in many human pursuits (Carver & Scheier, 2007). For example, the level of a person's need for power can influence how they interact with others. Zurbriggen (2000) found that high levels of power motivation in men predicted more frequent aggression. Similarly, research has uncovered several implications of the need for affiliation. For example, Langner and Winter (2001) established that people high in affiliation needs are more likely to make concessions in negotiations. McClelland has undertaken research on the need to achieve for more than four decades (Franken, 2007). He conducted a great deal of research on the differences between people who measure high in the need for achievement and people who measure low on the achievement scale (McClelland, 1988). Research participants testing high in the need for achievement were more resistant to social pressures and less conforming than were research participants testing low in the need for achievement. Young people high in the need to achieve were more likely to attend tertiary study institutions, obtain higher marks and be involved in community activities. They got along better with other people and enjoyed greater physical health. This brief review illustrates how specific needs such as the need for power, affiliation and achievement can play a part in shaping behaviour.

Research has also revealed that contextual factors influence specific needs. For instance, cultural factors can influence a person's need for achievement. A cross-cultural study compared the need to achieve among 372 male and female high school and college students living in Hong Kong (Salili, 1994). Some of the students were from England, while other students were native Chinese. The British students focussed on individual achievement in competitive situations, that is, what they could accomplish for themselves. The Chinese students, with the stronger sense of collectivism fostered by their culture, focussed more on family and group achievement, rather than acting to satisfy personal goals. In addition, the need for achievement is affected by child-rearing practices. Research with American-born Latino teenagers found that parental involvement was positively related to the need to achieve (Ibañez, Kuperminc, Jurkovic, & Perilla, 2004). The more the parents stressed the value of



education, the higher the measured achievement motivation among their children. Gender is another factor that has an impact on the need to achieve. Studies of children and adolescents suggest that some girls and young women experience conflict between the need to do their best and achieve at a high level, versus the need to appear feminine, empathic and caring. These research participants feared that achieving at too high a level would lead to unpopularity, especially with boys (Eccles, Barber, & Jozefowicz, 1999). Thus, contextual factors such as culture and gender have been shown to influence specific needs such as the need for achievement.

In reviewing the research on specific needs, it is noted that a number of fundamental human needs have been proposed such as the need for autonomy, relatedness and competence (e.g. Sheldon, Elliot, Kim, & Kasser, 2001; Stevens & Fiske, 1995). Specific needs such as the need for power, affiliation and relatedness have been shown to play a part in shaping behaviour (Carver & Scheier, 2007). Finally, specific needs are shaped by contextual factors (Eccles, Barber, & Jozefowicz, 1999; Ibañez, Kuperminc, Jurkovic, & Perilla, 2004; Salili, 1994). In relation to the current study, it is important to consider how fundamental needs may play out in the parent-child relationship and how the variety of specific needs may influence parenting. In addition, it is important to consider how contextual factors may influence the parent's needs as expressed within the parent-child relationship.

This section provided some of the context for considering how specific needs may shape parenting, outlining potentially dominant psychological needs that shape behaviour, and reviewing research on specific needs. The following section reviews the needs theory that will be used as a conceptual model for the interpretation of descriptions and themes that emerge from this study, that is, Murray's needs theory (1938).

### **3.3 Henry Murray**

The American psychologist Henry Murray (1893-1988) analysed and clarified the concept of needs more than any other theorist (Maddi, 1989). In this section, Murray's background and orientation relating to the discipline of psychology is considered, and his theory of needs is discussed and critically reviewed.

### 3.3.1 Background

The psychobiographical exploration by Anderson (1988) of Murray's early career describes how Murray came to be a psychologist, and provides the context for the development of Murray's fascination with the individual's internal psychological world. Attention is drawn to, among other things, how Murray's childhood was characterised by maternal rejection, his inner depressive tendencies and his distinctive concerns within relationships. Although a thorough psychobiographical exploration of Murray goes beyond the scope of this study, some of the context for Murray's interest in psychology and needs is provided.

It is noted that after establishing himself as a successful biochemist, in his early thirties, Murray underwent a "profound affectional upheaval" (Boring & Lindzey, 1967, p. 290). The upheaval was connected with having fallen in love with a married woman, while he himself was married. Upon reflecting on this period in his life, Murray describes himself as being "in a blaze" (Boring & Lindzey, 1967, p. 293). It was during this time that Murray developed a relationship with Carl Jung, a Swiss psychiatrist and influential thinker within the psychodynamic tradition. Stimulated by Jung's ideas, and finding some resolution for his personal conflicts from Jung's counsel, Murray's curiosity about the inner psychological world developed further. He was "vitaly interested in persons" and "intent on understanding each of them as a unit operating in his or her environment" (Boring & Lindzey, 1967, p. 292).

Murray experienced a strong desire to understand people and especially to make sense out of the chaotic, painful, emotional depths that he had sensed within himself (Anderson, 1988). At the age of 34, Murray abandoned his career in biochemistry to take an appointment at the Harvard Psychological Clinic, where he taught for more than 30 years. While at Harvard, in addition to developing a theory of personality based on needs, Murray became well known for developing the Thematic Apperception Test (TAT), a test consisting of a number of ambiguous pictures about which the subject must tell a story. The test is based on the assumption that the client expresses needs, personal concerns, fears, desires and conflicts through the stories that are told. The stories are later analysed to uncover the client's underlying needs and experiences. Murray's interest was in uncovering the individuality of each person, and he believed that the surface people present to the world barely alludes to the

depths within (Gieser & Stein, 1999). Murray criticized the academic psychology of his day, believing the research addressed trivial questions and failed to take a holistic approach to understanding the person (Anderson, 1988).

Although Murray adopted many psychodynamic concepts, as will be discussed in the next section, he drew attention to how psychodynamic theory did not sufficiently take the environment into account in the endeavour of understanding the individual (Murray & Shneidman, 1981). It is also noted that Murray undertook research from a normative context, rather than exploring psychological functioning among those showing considerable psychiatric distress.

In conclusion, Murray was drawn to understanding the complexity of an individual's inner conflicts and subconscious processes, and at the same time he was compelled to consider a holistic view, taking into account the influence of environmental forces in order to gain a deeper understanding of the person.

### 3.3.2 Murray's need theory



Murray is known as one of the most influential needs theorists (Deutsch, Coleman, & Marcus, 2006). In this section, Murray's classification of needs is discussed with reference to viscerogenic and psychogenic needs, the principle of tension reduction, manifest and latent needs, need strength, the idea of prepotency, proactive and reactive needs, avoidant and approaching needs, need integrates and the interrelatedness of needs. In addition, environmental influences are discussed, as well as how Murray related his conceptualisation of needs to personality theory. Connections and differences between Murray's need theory and the psychodynamic school of thought are outlined, and Murray's theory of needs is critically reviewed.

#### 3.3.2.1 *Psychogenic and viscerogenic needs*

According to Murray (1938), needs are motivational in nature, and refer to tendencies to move the individual in the direction of goals. He positioned that needs fall into two basic categories: psychogenic and viscerogenic needs. Psychogenic needs are psychological in nature, whereas the viscerogenic needs involve basic biological drives such as the need for food or sex. According to Murray, psychogenic needs are originally derived from

viscerogenic needs, and are largely learnt or acquired during the process of psychological development. More specifically, examples of psychogenic needs include the need for affiliation, achievement, recognition, dominance, autonomy and acquisition (see Appendix A for a list of the psychogenic needs of Murray (1938).

Murray (1938) was primarily interested in psychogenic needs, which he believed stood for common wishes that operated at a largely unconscious level. He was not concerned about whether or not needs were innate, but was interested in uncovering needs so as to understand the person (Franken, 2007).

Of Murray's list of needs, seven have stimulated further research, and are considered as important motivational forces: achievement, power, cognition, esteem, affiliation (also referred to as relatedness, intimacy and belonging), autonomy and competence (Deckers, 2004). The need to achieve has probably received more attention from psychologists than any other need (Deckers, 2004). Currently, the main proponent of need theory from Murray's tradition is McClelland, who has worked for more than forty years to validate the need for achievement and, to a lesser extent, the need for affiliation and the need for power (Franken, 2007).

### 3.3.2.2 *Tension reduction*

Murray (1938) proposed that when a need is activated, the individual is in a *state of tension*, and satisfaction of the need involves reduction of the tension. Thus, needs energise and direct behaviour. In addition, the individual will learn to attend to objects that they have found, in the past, to be associated with tension reduction, and will also perform acts that are associated with reducing tension.

Murray agreed with Freud (1923/1961) that people act to reduce physiological and psychological tension, but he did not believe that people strive for a tension-free state (Murray, 1959). It is the process of acting to reduce tension that is satisfying, according to Murray, rather than the attainment of a condition free of all tension. Thus, not only does the individual learn ways to respond so as to reduce tension, but the person learns to act in such a manner as to create tension, so that it can later be reduced, thereby increasing the amount of pleasure. In addition, Murray (1959) stressed the more positive characteristics of the individual, suggesting that a person needs to be creative if he or she is to maintain

psychological health. Murray emphasised that creativity is an inherent fundamental human disposition.

### 3.3.2.3 *Overt and covert needs*

Murray (1938) distinguished between *manifest* needs and *latent* needs, referring to needs that are either overt or covert. If a need is concealed and not expressed directly, it is said to be latent. Manifest needs refer to those needs that are permitted direct, immediate expression, whereas latent needs tend to be inhibited and repressed. The existence of latent needs is considered largely to be the outcome of the development of internalised structures that define acceptable behaviour. Some needs cannot be given expression without going against the conventions that have been taken from society, and these needs tend to operate at a covert level. Latent needs can be conscious or unconscious.

### 3.3.2.4 *Strength of needs*

The strength of a need is measured in terms of its frequency, intensity and duration (Murray & Shneidman, 1981). A need is considered to be strong if it occurs with high frequency or if it occurs occasionally with great intensity. It is also considered to be strong if once aroused, it endures for a long time in the absence of satisfaction. Murray maintained that childhood experiences play a major role in influencing which needs develop with the greatest strength (Maddi, 1989).

### 3.3.2.5 *Prepotency*

Murray (1938) used the term “prepotency” to refer to how needs differ with regard to the intensity with which they drive behaviour (Schultz & Schultz, 2008). Prepotency implies that at different times different needs are more intense or dominant. For example, if the need for water is not satisfied, it will dominate behaviour, taking precedence over all other needs.

### 3.3.2.6 *Proactive and reactive needs*

Murray (1938) differentiated between proactive and reactive needs. Reactive needs involve a response to an environmental force, such as the harm avoidance need being activated only when a threat is present. A proactive need is largely determined from within, as the result of something inside the person, rather than something that is external.

### 3.3.2.7 *Avoidant and approaching needs*

Murray (1938) also divided his needs into either avoidant/withdrawn needs or approaching/attached needs. Avoidant/withdrawn needs refer to avoiding objects and people, and approaching/attached needs refer to approaching objects and people or in a submissive or controlling way attaching oneself to them (Allen, 2003).

### 3.3.2.8 *Need integrate*

Murray proposed that needs are not necessarily linked to specific objects in the environment (Murray & Shneidman, 1981). However, it often happens that owing to experience, a person learns to associate certain objects with specific needs. Similarly, particular ways of responding, and the tendency to either approach or avoid these objects, may be acquired and associated with the need. Murray referred to this integration of the need and the associated environmental object, and instrumental acts, as a *need integrate* (Murray & Shneidman, 1981). A need integrate is a need for a certain type of interaction with a certain type of person or object (Schultz & Schultz, 2008).

### 3.3.2.9 *The interrelatedness of needs*

Needs do not function in isolation from one another, but interact to create areas of mutual influence and effect. Needs may fuse, there may be subsidiation of needs, and needs may be in conflict with one another (Murray, 1938; Murray & Shneidman, 1981).

When a pattern of action satisfies two or more needs at the same time, this is referred to as a *fusion* of needs (Carver & Scheier, 2007). For instance, by working to acquire fame and wealth, the needs for achievement, dominance and autonomy can be satisfied.

The concept of *subsidiation* refers to a situation in which one need is activated to aid in satisfying another need (Allen, 2003). For instance, the individual may exhibit aggressive needs, but these may aim to fulfil acquisitive needs. As another example, there is evidence that sexual activity, although motivating in its own right, can support a variety of other motives (Cooper, Shapiro, & Powers, 1998). When the operation of one need is solely instrumental in gratifying another need, the first need is considered as a subsidiary to the second. Exploring chains of subsidiation can be useful in terms of revealing a person's root motivation.

Murray (1938) also considered how needs may be in *conflict* with each other (Carver & Scheier, 2007). In his research he reported estimates for each subject relating to the intensity of conflict in certain key areas, for example, autonomy versus affiliation. Conflicting needs may give rise to distressing dilemmas. In line with psychodynamic thinking, Murray believed that much misery and most neurotic illness may be attributed to intense inner conflicts.

#### 3.3.2.10 *Activity needs and effect needs*

Murray distinguished between activity needs and effect needs (Maddi, 1989). He proposed that certain activities are performed purely for the satisfaction gained from engaging in the activity (activity needs), whereas other behaviours are undertaken for the end effect (effect needs).

#### 3.3.2.11 *Environmental influence*

Murray (1938) proposed that environmental factors play a significant role in the activation of the psychogenic needs (Allen, 2003). He called these forces or influences *press*, indicating that an environmental object or event presses or pressures the individual to behave in a specific fashion. He further argued that there was a difference between actual environmental forces, *alpha press*, and those that are only perceived, *beta press* (Murray, 1938). Murray believed that much of what is inside an organism was once outside the organism (Allen, 2003). For instance, a present need for security may have originated in past threats in the environment.

Over time, Murray placed increasing emphasis on the importance of environmental influences in understanding the person. He believed that “no theoretical system constructed on the psychological level will be adequate until it has been embraced and intermeshed with a cultural-sociological system” (Murray, 1959, p. 45). Murray also maintained a keen interest in general systems theory, paying attention to the interrelatedness of phenomena and the occurrence of reciprocating functional activities (Murray, 1959).

Murray introduced the concept of *thema* to refer to the interaction between need and press (Schultz & Schultz, 2008). The thema combines needs with the environmental factors that drive our behaviour. A thema is formed through early childhood experiences and plays a significant role in developing personality. Thema are mostly unconscious, and relate needs and presses in coherent, orderly patterns.

### 3.3.2.12 *Needs and personality*

Murray (1938) used the term “need” to refer to both a temporary happening and a relatively consistent trait of personality. Murray proposed that the psychologist can perceive uniformities among the episodes in a person’s life. An individual has a tendency to react in a similar way to similar situations, indicating consistency as well as change and variability. Recurrences and consistencies are due in part to the fact that impressions of a situation leave lasting traces which may be reactivated by the appearance of situations of a similar nature.

Thus, Murray considered some needs as temporary and changing whereas others are more deeply seated in our nature. Moreover, a need does not readily become a central element of personality if there is no barrier to its fulfilment. It is noted that much of Murray’s (1938) research focussed upon developing a theory of personality based on needs. However, for the purpose of this study, the emphasis is upon how Murray conceptualised needs. Exploring his theory of personality goes beyond the scope of this study.

### 3.3.2.13 *The psychodynamic school of thought*

Murray saw potential in the psychodynamic school of thought due to its emphasis on the inner world (Anderson, 1988). In addition, he found that many of the basic orientating perspectives of psychodynamic theory were useful, such as unconscious processes influencing conscious behaviour, the determining influence of childhood experiences, the conflict between an individual and his/her culture, the concepts of repression and projection, and the concepts of the id, ego and superego (Murray, 1938). Each of these concepts is briefly discussed.

As most academic psychologists of Murray’s time emphasised observable behaviour rather than exploring unseen processes, Murray was one of the first academic psychologists to accept and promote the idea that there are *unconscious processes* influencing conscious behaviour (Anderson, 1988). Murray emphasised how the individual is unaware of certain personal tendencies that influence behaviour, and how some of these tendencies are actively defended against and pushed away from consciousness (Murray, 1938; Murray & Shneidman, 1981). Murray considered it important to distinguish needs that are relatively conscious, and those that are relatively unconscious. A conscious need is one where there is an immediate retrospective awareness, where the individual can report accurately upon the need. An unconscious need relates to experiences where an individual may have no awareness of what is needed. A need may be the experience of a vague “lack” or “pressure” giving rise to



unrest, uneasiness, dissatisfaction (Murray, 1938, p. 75). As a general rule, unconscious needs are in opposition to how the individual would like to be perceived on a social level, and are unacceptable to the conscious self. Unconscious needs are commonly expressed in dreams, emotional outbursts, unpremeditated acts and projections. For example, an individual may not want to perceive personal aggressive feelings, but may dream of a violent act being committed. Murray was less interested in conscious, overt behaviour, and increasingly absorbed in the exploration of unconscious processes, as he believed that psychology should be concerned with “the point at which it begins to get difficult to understand what is going on” (Murray, 1938, p. 715)

Murray not only accepted the role of the unconscious in influencing behaviour, but also recognised the Freudian concepts of *repression* and *projection*. In depth psychologies from the classical Freudian model onwards, *repression* refers to a hypothesised mental process that functions to protect the individual from ideas, impulses and memories which would produce anxiety, apprehension or guilt were they to become conscious (Reber *et al.*, 2009). Repression is considered to operate at an unconscious level. Murray understood that repressed tendencies commonly find disguised expression. For instance, a repressed need for recognition may be expressed through performing in a theatre production. *Projection* is the process whereby what is inside the individual is misunderstood as coming from outside, or the process by which one ascribes one's own needs, emotions, dispositions, beliefs, values, etc. to another (Reber *et al.*, 2009). By means of illustration, an individual may feel that an acquaintance is envious of his/her belongings, when it is in fact the individual him/herself who is unconscious of personal feelings of envy. It was Murray's understanding of an individual's tendency to project into surrounding objects some of the imagery related to the need that is operating, that informed the development of the TAT. The TAT remains a popular and widely used psychological projective test to this day (Groth-Marnat, 2009).

The emphasis of Murray's work was upon uncovering inhibited or unconscious tendencies, as well as tracing current experience back to infantile experiences (Murray, 1938). In line with the psychodynamic thinking of his time, Murray emphasised *childhood experiences* and how they influence the development of specific needs. Murray believed that “some of the past is always alive in the present” (Murray, 1938, p. 44).

The influence of Freudian thinking can be seen in Murray's recognition of the effect of childhood experiences on adult behaviour, and in his notion that the personality is divided into the *id*, *ego* and *superego*. Although Murray (1938) used Freudian terms, his concepts differed from Freud. In line with Freud's theory, Murray maintained that the *id* is the locus of all innate impulsive tendencies. It provides energy and direction to behaviour and contains the primitive impulses that are not readily accepted by society. However, in addition, Murray suggested that the *id* contained innate impulses that society considers acceptable and desirable (Schultz & Schultz, 2008). According to Murray, the *id* also encompassed agreeable impulses, such as empathy, love and the tendency to master one's environment. In contrast to Freud's view, Murray did not view the *id* as an unchanging set of instincts but as varying in content from person to person (Maddi, 1989).

Murray (1938) considered the *superego* as the internalisation of social values and norms, which include the rules which are used to evaluate and judge behaviour. Children internalise these values and norms from interacting with their parents, caregivers, other authority figures and sources of influence such as the peer group. Schultz and Schultz (2008) note that Murray diverged from Freud's ideas by considering influences beyond the parent-child relationship. The authors add that according to Murray, the *superego* is not in a continual state of conflict with the *id*, as suggested by Freud, as the *id* contains positive forces such as love, as well as negative forces. While the *superego* works to prevent socially unacceptable impulses, it also works to establish how an acceptable need can be expressed and satisfied.

According to Freud (1923/1961), the *ego* mediates between the primitive demands of the *id* and the social inhibitions of the *superego*. Murray (1938) went beyond Freud's conceptualisation of the *ego* and maintained that the *ego* is the organiser of behaviour, and it consciously reasons and decides the direction of behaviour (Schultz & Schultz, 2008). The *ego* not only suppresses *id* pleasure but also promotes pleasure by organising and directing the expression of acceptable *id* impulses.

A major shortcoming of psychodynamic theory, according to Murray, was the narrowness of the motivational system that Freud had postulated. Murray saw Freud's division of instincts into *Eros* (life preserving instincts) and *Thanatos* (death instinct) as inadequate, proposing that a comprehensive approach should include additional needs (Boring & Lindzey, 1967).

Murray also criticised psychodynamic theory for inadequately dealing with the environment (Murray & Shneidman, 1981).

#### 3.3.2.14 *Critique of Murray's conceptualisation of needs*

Murray offers a rich, complex view of the person (Deutsch *et al.*, 2006). His theory can assist practitioners in becoming aware of the diversity of human needs and their expression. He draws attention to the environmental forces that influence needs, the childhood experiences that shape an individual and the often unconscious nature of needs. In addition, Murray went beyond the narrow, sexually oriented conflict model proposed by Freud (1923/1961) by describing and organising people's needs at the level of their everyday behaviour.

Nevertheless, Murray's theory of needs has its critics. His definition of a need was very broad, suggesting that anything that moves one to action is a need. As such, his concept is so heterogeneous that it defies neat and clear classification (Maddi, 1989). Needs may be manifest or covert, urgent or less urgent, changing or more consistent, conscious or unconscious. These, and other distinctions, yield a bewildering array of classifications of needs. Allen (2003) notes that at some points in his writings, Murray seems almost confused by his ideas. It seems unclear whether needs are drives or traits of personality. Furthermore, in considering Murray's list of needs, there appears to be too much overlap between needs, and it is difficult to make fine distinctions among them (Maddi, 1989). While his theory probably shows the difficulty of conceptualising human complexity, the heterogeneous nature of his conceptualisation of needs renders his theory complex and difficult to apply. Murray's list of needs was also seen by many as pursuing a course that would lead to longer and longer lists of needs of doubtful usefulness (Pittman & Zeigler, 2007).

Research has been conducted on some of Murray's needs, particularly the achievement, power and affiliation needs, but many needs on his list have not been well studied, and in some cases have been forgotten (Pittman & Zeigler, 2007). Another area of concern is that although Murray endeavoured to be rigorous and systematic in identifying needs, there is a large element of subjectivity in identifying covert, underlying needs. By means of illustration, in using the TAT, the existence of a need is inferred rather than conclusively identified. In addition, Murray points toward environmental influences in the development of needs. However, Murray does not make it clear how needs develop within an individual (Maddi, 1989). A major deficiency is the lack of a well-defined learning and developmental

theory of what determines the acquisition and strength of an individual's needs (Deutsch *et al.*, 2006)

In conclusion, Murray's classification of needs may be considered as overly complex, and a great deal of overlap exists among the needs. However, his complex perspective and his emphasis upon uncovering underlying needs, brought into focus the inner depths of the individual, and influenced the modern understanding of the person.

In this section, Murray's background and orientation relating to the discipline of psychology was discussed, and his theory of needs was outlined and critically reviewed. In the following section, research relating to the mother's expression of specific needs within the context of parenting is considered.

### **3.4 Specific needs and parenting**

Although Murray (1938) does not consider needs within the context of parenting, a number of needs, some of which are listed in his taxonomy of needs (see Appendix A, p. 151), may find specific expression within the mother-child relationship. This section considers research relating to parenting and specific needs of the mother.

A literature search revealed no research relating directly to specific needs in the taxonomy of needs and parenting (Murray, 1938). However, there is some evidence (e.g. Nicolson, 1999; Raeff, 1996; Wells, Hobfoll, & Lavin; 1999) which indirectly reveals the significance of the need for relatedness (referred to by Murray as the need for affiliation), nurturance, competence, meaning, construction, play and recognition within the parent-child relationship. In this regard, Wells, Hobfoll, and Lavin (1999) assessed the impact of resource losses and gains that occur in women's lives during the transition to motherhood. The study revealed that women may gain self-esteem, new meaning in life, a sense of competence, and an awareness of the positive assets of themselves and their social environment. As such, it appears that within the context of parenting, a mother may fulfil various needs, including meaning in life, competence and recognition. In a similar vein, a study by Raeff (1996) exploring maternal self-concept and culture, revealed that adult mothers particularly valued having fun with their children, the sense of achievement experienced as their children passed

developmental milestones, having someone to love, their children's love and company, and the way in which being a mother enabled the mothers to engage in a process that was considered to be rewarding and meaningful. In this way, motherhood may fulfil the mother's need for play, achievement, nurturance, relatedness, construction and meaning.

In addition to fulfilling certain needs, there is evidence (e.g. Nicolson, 1999) that being a mother may activate certain needs and thwart the fulfilment of these needs. Nicolson (1999) examined the positive and negative implications of the transition to motherhood. The study revealed that motherhood arouses joy and a sense of fulfilment, but at the same time may be a stressful experience, generating anxiety, feelings of incompetence and interpersonal loneliness, as well as a sense of loss relating to autonomy, time, appearance and occupational identity. Considering this finding, it appears that motherhood fulfils certain needs of the mother, but, in addition, may create tension and activate the mother's need for competence, relatedness, autonomy, play, affirmation and recognition.

The research relating to specific needs of the mother highlights potential needs that may be expressed by the participants in this study. However, the research does not refer to the breadth of needs referred to in Murray's taxonomy (Murray, 1938), nor is there reference to subconscious needs that may be dramatized within the context of parenting. This raises a number of questions pertaining to how the mother's needs may be dramatized within the mother-child relationship. For example, if a mother experiences a particularly high need in a certain area, how will this need manifest? It may be speculated that a high need for dominance could be dramatized as overly controlling parent-child interactions, with the mother potentially being unaware of her own needs in this regard. Perhaps a high need for nurturance is interconnected with attentive care-giving, or perhaps in certain cases, overprotection. Or if a mother experiences a high need for deference, this may be interconnected with the mother not taking an assertive stance with her children. Perhaps a high need for avoidance is interconnected with a parent consistently assuming an authoritarian position, and not displaying any vulnerability within the parent-child relationship.

Questions also arise as to what scenarios may transpire if a mother's need in a particular area is relatively low. For instance, it may be that a lack of need for nurturance is interconnected with encouraging independence, and/or in certain cases, neglectful parenting. A low need for order may be interconnected with a chaotic home environment and/or a relaxed atmosphere in

the home. It is possible that a relatively low need for blame avoidance is related to creating a flexible, relaxed home environment. Within the current study, it will be important to explore the participant's various expressions of numerous, interconnected needs within the context of parenting. It will also be necessary to consider the manifestation of additional needs such as the need for meaning, which is not listed in Murray's taxonomy of needs (Murray, 1938).

It is noted that the research should consider how Murray's conceptualisation of need-related concepts such as *thema*, *press* and *need integrate* (Murray, 1938, Murray & Shneidman, 1981) find expression in the context of parenting. For example, are there specific *thema* and *need integrates* that can be identified, such as a threat to the child activating the mother's need for nurturance? In a similar vein, is there evidence of needs subconsciously shaping parenting, such as a mother being unaware that her need for defence results in her being unempathic and insensitive to her child's needs? Considering the current study, it will be necessary to identify and explore various and complex manifestations of the mother's needs within the context of parenting that may not be highlighted in current research.

The purpose of this section was to provide additional context for considering how specific needs may manifest and be dramatized within the mother-child relationship. In the following section, academic literature referring to the needs of the mother from attachment theory and psychodynamic frameworks will be discussed.

### **3.5 The needs of the mother: attachment theory and psychodynamic theory**

Research and theoretical formulations regarding the link between parents' psychological needs and parenting has mainly been approached from attachment theory and psychodynamic frameworks (e.g. Benedek, 1970a, 1977b, 1970c, 1973; Brazelton & Cramer; 1990; Cohler & Paul, 2002; Fraiberg *et al.*, 1975; Manzano, Espasa, & Zilkha, 1999; Rholes & Simpson, 2004; Scharf & Shulman, 2006). To a lesser degree, family systems theory indirectly addresses how the needs of the parents may play out in the parent-child relationship through the conceptualisation of processes such as triangulation. In this section, the aspects of psychodynamic thinking that are particularly relevant to the study of parenting in relation to the psychological needs of the mother are considered, as is the systemic concept of triangulation. Specific reference is made to re-enacting developmental conflicts, the notion of narcissism and the child being perceived as an extension of the parent, attachment theory and

the family triangle. In addition, the reviewed theory is critically discussed. In line with the focus of the current study, the discussion focuses on research from a normative context, rather than among those identified as showing psychiatric distress.

### 3.5.1 Re-enacting developmental conflicts

This section discusses how parents may re-enact their own developmental conflicts in their relationships with their children. Attention is drawn to how the mother's needs relating to prior conflicts manifest within mother-child interactions.

Psychoanalysis refers to both a theory of human behaviour and a set of techniques for exploring the underlying motivations of human behaviour (Reber *et al.*, 2009). Much of the psychodynamic focus on the study of parenthood has been on the influence of the parent's own childhood experiences on their response to parenthood (Cohler & Paul, 2002). For instance, Benedek (1959, 1970a, 1970b, 1970c, 1973), one of the pioneers of psychodynamic theory, made a considerable contribution in exploring the mother-child dyad, taking into account underlying motivational processes influencing the mother's interaction with the child. She maintained that the mother's personal joys and struggles experienced as an infant are stimulated once again by the act of looking after her own child. A mother will find it difficult to respond appropriately to her baby's demands if she has experienced unresolved issues relating to her own childhood years. Unresolved conflicts may either lead the mother to overprotect the baby through continuing needs of her own to be cared for, or the mother's feelings of deprivation may play out in her failure to respond to her baby's needs. In this way, the mother's emotional needs play out within the parenting role. Similarly, Levey (as cited in Rudy & Grušec, 2006) developed the concept of 'over-protection', which referred to excessive parental control and intrusion into the life of a child. He maintained that this behaviour was rooted in the parents' emotional needs having been unmet in childhood and the residue of this early experience manifested as either overprotection or rejection. Overprotection involved unconscious emotional reactions parents had to the way they themselves had been parented.

Benedek (1973) also suggested that the mother's prior experiences continue to be evoked in later life through the process of being a mother. When the child reaches sexual maturity,

often coinciding with parental middle age, the parent's own revived conflicts may facilitate or impede the child's ability to move towards independence and find a partner. Benedek maintained that the adult child's marriage and the beginning of their parenthood was particularly likely to awaken the mother's unconscious identification with her child. This may be reflected in the mother's attempts to be involved in many aspects of her child's life. In a similar vein, Steinberg and Steinberg (as cited in Scharf & Shulman, 2006) note how an adolescent's physical and sexual maturity might incite parents' concerns about their own bodies, their own physical attractiveness, their own sexuality and their own sexual experiences as adolescents. Benedek (1973) also maintains that parenthood is timeless, and that parents and children continue to negotiate their relationship with each other.

Benedek's theory (1970a, 1970b, 1970c, 1973) is consistent with the study entitled 'Ghosts in the nursery' by Fraiberg *et al.* (1975), (as discussed in the previous chapter), which illustrated how an important determinant of the mother's response to her baby was her relationship with her own mother. A more recent study by Cowan (1992) involved following up on nearly 100 expectant parent couples and a group of non-parent couples in Northern California over a period of more than a decade. In a similar vein to the psychodynamic perspective of Fraiberg *et al.* (1975), the study noted that parents must be on guard not to repeat with their children problems experienced in their own growing up. The studies reviewed indicate how unresolved conflicts from a parent's past inform their emotional needs, which, in turn, plays out in the mother-child relationship.

Kramer, Byerly, and Akhtar (cited in Cohler & Paul, 2002) suggested that parents who experienced difficulty in realising a sense of psychological autonomy with their own parents show difficulties in encouraging psychological autonomy in their children. These parents may interfere with their children forming friendships and pursuing connections and activities outside the home, and may not promote a sense of autonomy and separateness. Stierlin (1974) proposes that parents may either use their offspring to realize the successes and goals they believe they never attained, or they may pull their children to them so that they are unable to leave the family of origin. In these instances, the mother parents in a way that reflects her underlying and often unconscious needs and conflicts relating to her sense of autonomy.

Brazelton and Cramer (1990) describe how parents might replay scenes from their own childhood in their interactions with their children. The authors propose that parents'



fantasies, expectations and inner conflicts mediate the interaction between them and their infants. Specifically, parents tend to transfer their own past experiences onto the child by projection. Parents may use three forms of projection that may overlap. The first type of projection involves the child representing a significant person from the parent's past, such as a son being perceived to be like the parent's father. The second type of projection involves the parent-child relationship re-enacting past themes of former relationships, such as a mother attempting to create a harmonious relationship with her child, when her own relationship with her mother was conflicted. In the third type of projection, the child represents a part of the parent's own unconscious, frequently some of the parent's negative aspects. For example, the child may be considered lazy when the parent does not tolerate this characteristic within themselves. In such instances, the child is assigned the role of serving the parent's needs by providing them with missed experiences from their past (Scharf & Shulman, 2006). In this way, a parent may express their own unresolved conflicts and needs.

Concerning the first type of projection proposed by Brazelton and Cramer (1990), which involves the child representing a significant person from the parent's past, Scharf and Shulman (2006), using case studies, demonstrate how a parent may attempt to correct and undo past experiences with their own parents in their current relationships with their adolescents. The study reveals that in many cases the attempts are unsuccessful, and the past is repeated rather than resolved. The authors argue that it is a parent's ability to reflect on and integrate the past that enables them to break the intergenerational transmission of adverse parenting. Reflection on the past requires acceptance of the imperfections of their parents, themselves and their children, and letting go of the desire to fulfil longed-for needs.

Brazelton and Cramer (1990) emphasise that projection is not in itself pathological, and may form part of the process of empathic understanding. Rather, successful parenting involves discerning the similarities and differences between the parent and the child. It is noted that difficulties arise when parents are not sensitive to, or aware of, their own motivations and behaviours.

Benedek (1959), while highlighting the problems caused by parents re-enacting prior conflicts, goes on to propose that healthy, normal mothering involves the repetition and working through of primary conflicts with one's own mother, and that the process facilitates the resolution of those conflicts. Furthermore, in each 'critical period' of the child's

development, the child revives the parent's related developmental conflicts. This either stimulates pathologic manifestations in the parent, or, if the conflict is resolved, the parent achieves a new level of integration. This view informs much of the discussion of parenthood from a psychodynamic perspective to this day (Cohler & Paul, 2002).

There is evidence to support the notion that parenthood can facilitate the resolution of the parent's prior conflicts (e.g. Bibring, Dwyer, Huntington, & Valenstein, 1961; Cowan, 1992). The Boston pregnancy study (Bibring, Dwyer, Huntington, & Valenstein, 1961) revealed that some women who showed a characteristically dependent mode of relating to others, when presented with the challenge of becoming a parent, were forced to find new ways of interacting. The study revealed that the mothers matured emotionally as they kept abreast with their babies' development. These new mothers were reported to be better able to realize psychological independence from their own mothers upon becoming a parent. Similarly, the study of Cowan (1992) revealed that some men and women manage to come to terms with painful early experiences in a way that enables them to create new and more adaptive patterns. The authors maintain that becoming a family provides a challenge for some men and women that leads to their growth as individuals, couples, and as parents. Thus, it is not inevitable that past conflicts are evoked and repeated during parenthood. In some instances, the past is resolved, resulting in greater maturity and emotional growth.

Cohler and Paul (2002), while acknowledging the significance of the parent's past in influencing parent-child interaction, caution against only considering how a parent's early conflicts may play out in the parenting role. It is also important to consider the transformations taking place across adolescence and adulthood and through the later years in an individual's development. The parent's responses to care-giving are formed within the parent's continuing life story. It follows that the psychological needs of the mother, as expressed within the parent-child relationship, should be considered in the context of the mother's entire life experience, rather than focussing exclusively on early childhood conflicts. While the initial contribution of Benedek (1959) to understanding the mother-child dyad was explained in terms of Freud's psychology of psychological conflict, her theory went beyond Freud's psychology. Specifically, Benedek took into account the fact that parent and child *reciprocally* influence each other across the course of life (Parsons, 1975). She highlighted the impact of care-giving for the mother, noting that the impact included the emergence of the ability to receive enjoyment and enhanced self-confidence from caring for her baby. Finally,

in reflecting on her contribution, Benedek (1959) noted the importance of both biology and culture in determining the interplay of parent and child. From Benedek's perspective, the emotional needs of the mother are reciprocally influenced by the child, and biological and cultural influences on the mother-child interaction need to be taken into account.

In summary, while parents may enact unresolved struggles anew with their children to the detriment of the child, parents may also resolve prior conflicts during parenthood. Furthermore, the psychological needs of the mother, as expressed within the parent-child relationship, need to be considered in the context of the mother's entire life experience. It is also noted that the reciprocal influences between a mother and child should be taken into account when exploring how the psychological needs of the mother are evoked in the mother-child relationship.

Integration of these findings with the theory of needs of Murray (1938) draws attention to specific needs which may unconsciously be expressed within the context of parenting. For example, considering Benedek's theory (1970a, 1970b, 1970c, 1973), the *press* (see section 3.3.2.12) of witnessing the child's developmental experiences may activate various needs within the mother. It appears that witnessing the child's development stimulates the mother's recollections of related distressing experiences in her childhood, which may activate the need for nurturance, which, in turn, may be associated with protective behaviour towards the child. More specifically, in some instances, the mother may overprotect her child through continuing needs of her own to be cared for. Alternatively, one may speculate that witnessing the child's developmental transitions may stimulate different needs within the mother such as the need for aggression, autonomy and/or dominance. These needs may be stimulated owing to the mother's identification with these aspects of her own parent. In such an instance, the mother's feelings of deprivation may be dramatized in her failure to respond to her child's needs. An interpretation of Levey's concept of 'over-protection' (as cited in Rudy & Grusec, 2006), in relation to Murray's conceptualisation of needs is that recollections of distressing experiences from childhood activate the mother's need for dominance and control, which may manifest as excessive parental control and intrusion into the life of her child.

It is noted that Benedek (1959) proposes that healthy, normal mothering involves the repetition and working through of primary conflicts with one's own mother, and that the process facilitates the resolution of those conflicts. Considering Murray's theory (1938), one

may speculate that in the case of healthy, normal mothering, the mother does not experience excessively strong needs that interfere with good enough care-giving and/or the mother is not guided in the main by unconscious needs and unresolved conflicts.

It is important to consider how the process of projection within the parent-child relationship can be integrated with the theory of needs of Murray (1938). Considering the first type of projection suggested by Brazelton and Cramer (1990), if the child represents a significant person from the parent's past, the mother may assume that the child will either fulfil and/or thwart her needs in the same manner as the person the child represents from her past. For example, if a child represents a loving figure, the mother may assume that the child will be a source of pleasure and fulfil the mother's need for relatedness. Alternatively, if the child is perceived as representing a rejecting and/or potentially dominating figure, the mother may perceive that the child will not fulfil her need for relatedness, and as such the child may activate unfulfilled needs and generate tension for the mother. In this way, the child may play a part in re-enacting past themes from the mother's former relationships and be involved in the second type of projection suggested by Brazelton and Cramer (1990), i.e. re-enacting past relationships.



In considering how Brazelton and Cramer's (1990) third type of projection may be integrated with Murray's theory, in instances where the child represents a part of the parent's own unconscious, the child may be unconsciously perceived as representing the mother's fulfilled and unfulfilled needs. For example, perhaps the mother has inadequately fulfilled needs for achievement and recognition. These needs are projected onto the child and the mother may consequently push the child toward high academic achievement, thereby compensating for her own unfulfilled needs. Or perhaps a mother has a strong need for blame avoidance which is projected onto the child. This may be interconnected with the mother taking an overly controlling stance with the child and not tolerating any disobedience or challenge to her authority.

Cohler and Paul (2002) draw attention to the fact that a parent's responses to care-giving are formed within the parent's continuing life story, and that consideration needs to be given to the transformations taking place across adolescence and adulthood and through the later years in an individual's development. In relation to Murray's theory (1938), it may be that particularly strong needs that developed within the mother owing to the fulfilment of these

needs being obstructed in childhood, may find adequate fulfilment during the course of life. As such, unfulfilled needs from childhood that could potentially be detrimental to the parent-child relationship may not necessarily manifest pathologically within the context of parenting. One can also speculate that during the course of life, different needs will be obstructed and may become dominant needs, which may be dramatized within the mother-child relationship.

This section discussed how parents may re-enact their own developmental conflicts and related needs within their relationships with their children. The next section considers how the child may fulfil the mother's need for recognition, affirmation and achievement, and how the child may be perceived as an extension of the mother.

### **3.5.2 Narcissism and the child as an extension of the parent**

Freud (1914/1953), in his writings on narcissism, proposed that parents need to view their child as perfect, as this provides the parent with a sense of increased self-esteem. From Freud's perspective, love for one's child is a form of self-regard. Thus, the relationship with one's offspring is a means to address the parent's need for self-esteem, recognition and affirmation. Moreover, the parent identifies with the child's personal attainments which the parent had desired for themselves. In this way, the child's achievements address the parent's psychological needs.

Following on from Freud's conceptualisation of narcissism in the parent-child relationship, Manzano, Espasa, and Zilkha (1999), present their concept of narcissistic scenarios of parenthood. According to the authors, the narcissistic aspect of the parent-child relationship refers to how the parent views the child as a representation of him/herself. The narcissistic aspect of the relationship co-exists with a relationship where the child is loved as a separate being. The authors propose that both relational aspects occur in varying proportions in all parent-child relationships. They further explain that narcissistic scenarios include parental projection onto the child and parental counter-identification. They show how these processes are unconsciously embodied and enacted in varying proportions in the cases they observed in their clinical practice of therapeutic consultation with parents and young children. Depending on the individual situation, the effects of projection and counter-identification may assist with child development, or if the narcissistic element is excessive, the effects may be harmful to

the child. If the narcissistic element is too dominant, the parent fails to sufficiently regard and love the child as a separate being, which interferes with the parent's ability to remain empathetically attuned with the child.

Cohler and Paul (2002) point out that the term narcissism and the notion of self-love tend to have overly negative connotations in psychodynamic theory. The authors propose that rather than working to the detriment of the child, the hopes and expectations of the parents form the basis of concern for the child's well-being. It is favourable for both the parents and the child when the parents affirm the child's abilities, and encourage their growth and development. Both the parent's and the child's sense of self-regard is enhanced when the parent interacts with and identifies with the child. Cohler and Paul (2002) maintains that it is only in extreme instances that parents place too much emphasis on their offspring's accomplishments to the detriment of their well-being. Furthermore, if a parent is overly preoccupied with the child's attainments, to the degree that their sentiments and actions interfere with appropriate empathic responses to the child, this is understood as a deficit in the parent's own development, stemming from the experience of significant empathic failure in the parent's past. In such instances, the parents may view their child as an extension of themselves, becoming overly involved, or may distance themselves from their child.

Kohut and Wolf (1978) built on the discussion of narcissism by Freud (1914/1953), and suggested that it is difficult to care for another unless the parent is able to experience self-love or self-regard. Ornstein and Ornstein (1985) propose that in the typical committed family, each generation looks for continued validation and support throughout life, and each generation provides empathic support for the other. Parents and offspring maintain an ongoing need to use each other in ways appropriate for their particular point in their life.

Integration of these findings with the theory of needs of Murray (1938) highlights how a mother may specifically fulfil her need for recognition, affirmation and achievement within the context of parenting. The parent may identify with the child's potentially fulfilled needs in this regard, vicariously experiencing the fulfilment of her own needs. This process may be beneficial for the child, and only in extreme cases, where the child is not sufficiently regarded and loved as a separate being, will the effects of this process be detrimental (Cohler and Paul, 2002). In relation to the current research, it is considered important to explore additional

needs which may be fulfilled vicariously within the mother-child relationship, such as the need for relatedness, play and harm avoidance.

Kohut and Wolf's (1978) suggestion that it is difficult for the parent to care for another unless the parent experiences self-love and self-regard can be integrated with Murray's (1938) theory of needs. The implication may be that if a mother's need for relatedness and love has not been adequately fulfilled, she may struggle to fulfil her child's needs in this regard. Taking this notion further, it may be that a mother may struggle to fulfil various needs that the child experiences, if the mother herself has not experienced the adequate fulfilment of a particular need. For example, a mother's unfulfilled need for recognition and affirmation may manifest as not being able to praise and affirm the child or fulfil the child's needs in these areas.

This section considered how the child may fulfil the mother's need for recognition, affirmation and achievement, and how the child may be perceived as an extension of the mother. It was noted that a parent's need for recognition, affirmation and achievement may result in excessive preoccupation with the attainments of their offspring. However, in an average devoted family, the hopes and expectations of the parents for their children are likely to promote mutual well-being. These findings were integrated with the theory of needs of Murray (1938) so as to explore different processes that may manifest in relation to the mother's needs within the context of parenting. The following section reviews modern shifts in psychodynamic thinking and attachment theory relating to the expression of the mother's needs within the mother-child relationship.

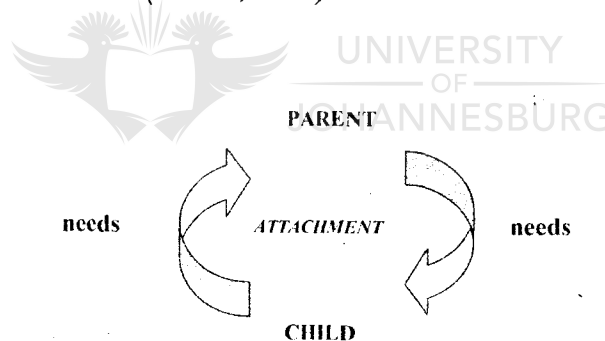
### **3.5.3 Modern shifts in psychodynamic thinking and attachment theory**

Psychoanalysis has moved away from Freud's original focus on wish, drive and conflict towards a focus on psychological needs arising in connection with care-giving outcomes in childhood (Cohler & Paul, 2002). Psychoanalysis has shifted from a theory of the person based on mental conflict to a relational psychology. In line with this shift, attachment has been the principal theory in the area of emotional and social development for the past twenty years, and is one of the most dominant theories in developmental psychology (Mayseless, 2006). Attachment theory, as developed by Bowlby (1969/1982, 1973) and Ainsworth (1969), describes the dynamics of long-term relationships between humans (see section

2.2.4.5 for a more detailed description of attachment theory). Although attachment theory is not a needs theory, Bowlby related attachment and closeness to the survival needs of nurturance and security (Pittman & Zeigler, 2007). In this way, attachment is represented as a basic human need. Normal social and emotional development requires an experience of connectedness and relatedness to others. In the course of normal, healthy development, parents form secure attachments with their children.

Dallos (2006) notes that while the early attachment relationship is described in relation to the *child's* biologically determined needs, the parent's attachment to the child may also be considered in a similar fashion, that is, as related to their own needs (see Figure 3.2). Studies exploring how parents respond to their children have shown that early physical contact, touch and smiling are very important for the mother, enabling her to feel bonded to her child. In this way, attention is drawn to how the mother-child relationship fulfils the mother's need for attachment.

*Figure 3.2 Needs and attachment (Dallos, 2006)*



The notion of attachment can be thought of as the need for affiliation, or belongingness, or relatedness (Pittman & Zeigler, 2007). Deckers (2004) notes that the need for relatedness has received extensive attention from psychologists, beginning with Murray (1938) and Maslow (1970). Various authors (e.g. Reis, Sheldon, Gable, Roscoe, & Ryan, 2000; Sheldon, Elliot, Kim, & Kasser, 2001) verified that the need for relatedness is one of the fundamental psychological needs.

Bowlby (1969/1982, 1973) discussed two major systems, that is the attachment and care-giving systems. Attachment concerns the motivation of the infant to receive care, whereas care-giving concerns the motivation of the parents to give care and protection (Mayseless,



2006). Care-giving is perceived as being driven by the parent's need to protect and care for their children. See section 2.2.4.5 for a discussion of how attachment influences parenting.

Concerning the underlying motivation for the care-giving system, like Bowlby (1969/1982, 1973), George and Solomon (1999) propose that the function of the care-giving behavioural system is the survival of the young, with the primary goal of ensuring the child's safety. An essential feature of the care-giving system is that situations of danger and threat should activate care-giving and protection of the child (Solomon & George, 2006). Mayseless (2006) also contends that the function of the care-giving behavioural system is the survival of one's offspring to maturity and reproduction. The author adds that this function is facilitated through three separate and specific set goals: to keep the child safe, to keep the child happy and content, and to promote the child's ability to manage in the world.

Integrating the findings of modern research from attachment theory and Murray's theory of needs (Murray, 1938; Murray & Shneidman, 1981) draws attention to the strength of the mother's need to nurture within the mother-child relationship, and how a child can fulfil a mother's needs in this regard. While Murray (1938) maintains that a need does not usually become a dominant force within personality if there is no obstacle to its satisfaction, it appears that the need for nurturance as experienced within the mother-child relationship is particularly strong even if there is no obstruction to the need being fulfilled in the mother's past. Rather, the mother's need to protect and care for her child is a sign of health, and arises in the course of normal, healthy development.

This section reviewed modern shifts in psychodynamic thinking and attachment theory that relate to the expression of the mother's needs within the mother-child relationship. It was noted that attachment theory highlights how parenting is largely motivated by the desire to nurture, protect and ensure the child's safety. In addition, attachment theory highlights how the need for attachment and relatedness is a basic human need that finds expression and fulfilment within the mother-child relationship. In the next section, the systemic concept of triangulation is considered in relation to the needs of the mother.

### 3.5.4 Triangulation

Bowen (1966) identified a number of forces that shape the emotional-relationship system of the family. He proposed that the triangle, which is a three-person relationship system, is the basic building block of the family's emotional system. Moreover, a two-person system is unstable because it has difficulty tolerating tension and tends to involve a third person so as to maintain stability. According to his theory, in the event of two people experiencing difficulties within their relationship, one or both will direct attention to, and draw in a third member. Bowen emphasised that people react to anxiety within a relationship by turning attention to a third person, which is referred to as triangulation. For instance, a mother who is experiencing marital conflict may discuss her frustration with her child. In this case, the wife reduces her anxiety by focusing on the mother-child interaction. Similarly, referring to the same situation, instead of discussing marital problems with his wife, the husband might spend more time at work. He would thus be making work a part of his triangular system. In both examples, while anxiety is reduced, neither the husband nor the wife resolves the root cause of their anxiety. Bowen (1966), in conceptualising the family triangle, although not referring to the concept of needs, illustrated how a parent's need to reduce anxiety within the relationship with a spouse could manifest and play out in the parent-child relationship. More specifically, experiencing a lack of affection or intimacy in the marital relationship may lead parents to meet their emotional needs by seeking a closer relationship with their child. Over-involvement with the child may reflect the mother's needs, rather than the child's emotional needs. (The influence of marital relations on parenting is further discussed in section 2.2.2.4.)

This section reviewed the literature relating specifically to how the needs of the mother may manifest within the mother-child relationship. The next section provides a critical review of the theory that has been discussed.

### 3.5.5 Critique

Although Benedek (1959) drew attention to broader influences upon parent-child interaction, overall, psychodynamic explanations of adult characteristics and patterns rely primarily on the individual's experience of care-giving in infancy and early childhood (Cohler & Paul, 2002). The assumption that psychological development in the first years of life can serve as a template for understanding adult development needs to be questioned (Cohler & deBoer,

1996; Colarusso & Nemiroff, 1979; Nemiroff & Colarusso, 1990). Although relationships across the course of life may be influenced by experiences during early childhood, life changes across later years also influence the experience of self and others. The fundamental conflicts of childhood may be the first of many important changes across the course of life.

A criticism of psychodynamic research is that few psychodynamic propositions have been submitted to systematic tests, and the formulations are largely theoretical (Cohler and Paul, 2002). Most of the research is based on case studies, which draws into question whether generalisations can be drawn to the broader population. However, in response psychodynamic theory has made available the evidence used in formulating assumptions regarding meanings and in the study of particular lives.

Bowen's (1966) theory has received criticism from a feminist perspective. Leupnitz (1988) points out that Bowen has overemphasised the mother's contribution towards the child's symptom development. In addition, Leupnitz highlights how Bowen does not contextualise maternal behaviour or critique patriarchal assumptions about gender roles, which may lead to women's socially prescribed roles being pathologised.

This chapter considered parenting from the perspective of the needs of the mother. The concept of needs was considered, followed by a review of the literature addressing specific psychological needs. The theory of needs of Murray (1938) was outlined and critiqued, and finally, theory relating specifically to needs within the context of parenting was reviewed and critically discussed. The following chapter outlines the research design and methodology of the study.

## CHAPTER 4

### RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

*"A mom forgives us all our faults, not to mention one or two we don't even have."*

*(Brault, n.d.)*

This chapter outlines the methods and procedures implemented for the thematic analysis. Issues related to trustworthiness are considered and reflexivity and ethical considerations are outlined. The first section considers the methodological framework for the study.

#### 4.1 Qualitative methodology

In recent years, qualitative research has become a recognised and respected research approach, spanning numerous disciplines and contexts (Gibbs, 2007). According to McRoy (1995), the qualitative paradigm stems from an anti-positivistic, interpretive approach to research. The author adds that qualitative research is holistic and aims to understand social life and the meaning that people attach to their everyday lives. In the broadest sense, the qualitative research paradigm refers to research that draws out participants' accounts of meaning, experience or perceptions (McRoy, 1995). In addition, it produces descriptive data in the form of participants' written or spoken words. McRoy (1995) proposes that qualitative research emphasises identifying the participant's beliefs and values that underlie the phenomena being studied. Moreover, the qualitative researcher is concerned with understanding rather than explaining, and the approach focuses upon the subjective exploration of reality from the perspective of an insider. Fouche (2005) notes that the key aspects of qualitative research are diverse, and the various designs used by qualitative researchers differ, depending on the aim of the study, the research question, and the skills and resources available to the researcher.

The decision to adopt a qualitative methodology was guided by the area of investigation. As the research intends to explore parenting and psychological needs, the methodology used needs to capture complex, dynamic processes that are highly contextual and difficult to quantify. The study aims to gather a holistic, in-depth understanding of human behaviour, and involves uncovering the experiential dimensions and subjective world of the individual regarding parenting and psychological needs. Gathering an integrated, in-depth understanding of the area of inquiry necessitates the use of a qualitative methodology.

This section outlined the methodological framework for the study, showing how the decision to adopt a qualitative methodology was guided by the area of investigation. In the following section, the research design is discussed.

## **4.2 Research design**

This section discusses the design of the study. The selection of participants, interview process, text collection and analysis is described below.

### **4.2.1 Selection of participants**

Qualitative studies are concerned with a small number of participants who are often purposefully selected (Smith & Osborn, 2003). In the current study, the selection of participants was based on the extent to which the participants could facilitate understanding of the phenomena being studied, and not the extent to which the findings could be generalised. Three mothers were selected who were between 35 and 55 years of age, had completed ten or more years of schooling, and who had one to three teenage children. These criteria were chosen for the following reasons: firstly, mothers were selected since most parenting responsibilities are allocated to mothers (Parke *et al.*, 2005). Secondly, as qualitative inquiry requires full and accurate descriptions of experiences, the participants needed to be linguistically competent (Polkinghorne, 1989). For this reason, the participants that were selected had completed ten or more years of schooling. Finally, as the teenage years can be challenging in terms of parent-child interaction (Mayseless & Scharf, 2006), parents with this age group of dependants were selected in the hope that the interview material would yield rich information.

I requested referrals for suitable participants from three different sources, namely a manager of an NGO, a professional within a consultancy firm, and a professional with an architectural practice. The sources were identified with the intention of selecting sources from a variety of different contexts such as an NGO and a private consultancy business. In addition, these sources were selected as they were easily accessible. I explained the concept of the study, as well as the selection criteria for the participants, and asked whether they could assist in recommending suitable candidates. Each person identified a potential participant. The three mothers were contacted by telephone and invited to participate in the study. The purpose of the research was explained in broad terms, indicating that mothers' experience of parenting was the focus of the study. Care was taken not to mention the emphasis upon the psychological needs of the mother to the prospective participants. The rationale for not mentioning psychological needs was that alluding to the mother's psychological needs at the outset might have the effect of leading the participants' opinion of their experience of parenting in a specific direction.

During the telephone conversation, I explained that the study would explore a specific dimension of the parenting experience, but that this would not be disclosed to the participants until the completion of the interviews, as I did not want to lead the participant's thoughts regarding the specific area of investigation. I asked whether the prospective participants would like to participate.

Each of the prospects agreed to be a part of the study. Jane and Lesley's interviews took place in a small interview room in an office building in a Johannesburg suburb. As Anina lived some distance away from the office building where the interviews were to be held, she requested that her interviews be conducted at her home, which was agreed.

#### **4.2.2 Interviews**

Text was collected using a three-phase interview process, as outlined by Seidman (2006). The method combines life-history interviewing and focussed, in-depth interviewing. In this approach, the interviewer uses primarily open-ended questions and builds upon and explores the participant's responses to the questions. The aim of this approach is to enable the

participant to reconstruct her experience within the area of study by exploring her thoughts, feelings and understanding of her experiences, as well as the context of the experiences. The most distinguishing feature of the approach is that a series of three separate interviews are conducted with each participant. The reason for this is that people's behaviour becomes meaningful and understandable when placed in the context of their lives. The first interview establishes the context of the participant's experiences. The second allows the participant to reconstruct the details of their experience within the context in which it occurs. The third interview encourages the participant to reflect on the intellectual and emotional connections between the area of investigation and the context of their lives. (See Appendix C, p. 155, for the interview schedule.)

In the first interview, the participants were asked to talk about their lives up until the time they became parents, going back as far as possible within the time allocated for the interview. Because the topic of the study is the experience of being a parent and personal psychological needs, the first interview focussed on the participants' past experience of being parented, and their emotional needs during their earlier years. The participants were asked to describe their childhood and explore their perceptions of their emotional needs. During the second interview the participants explored their experiences of being parents. They were asked about their relationships with their children, as well as what they wished for, or wanted, for their children and for themselves. In the third interview the participants were encouraged to reflect on their experience of parenting, and how their psychological needs manifest within their parenting practices, beliefs and attitudes. The aim of the third interview was to encourage the participants to explore how the different factors in their lives interacted to bring them to their present situation. The idea was that the combination of exploring the past to clarify the events that led the participants to where they are now, and describing their present experience, established conditions for reflecting upon what they are doing now in their lives. By conducting a series of three separate interviews the participants were given the opportunity to place their parenting behaviour in the context of their lives, and the lives of those around them. Each interview was scheduled to be a week apart to provide the participants with time to reflect on the preceding interview.

At the beginning of the first interview, the participants were informed about the procedure for the study. They were provided with an information document and a consent form (see Appendix B, p. 152), and were assured that the interviews would be handled in strictest

confidence. It was explained that they could choose to withdraw from the study at any time and that they could refuse to answer any questions, if they so wished. The participants were encouraged to voice any concerns and to ask questions regarding the interview process. The interviews were semi-structured and lasted between forty-five minutes and one-and-a-half hours. A semi-structured interview format was used so as to encourage the participant to focus on describing experiences and content that related to the area of investigation, while at the same time facilitating spontaneous communication and expression. As noted by Smith and Osborn (2003), the task of the interviewer is to encourage the participant to explore the topic with as little prompting as possible. In this way, the interviewer guides the participants towards certain areas and themes, but does not to guide the participants towards certain opinions regarding the area of inquiry. To this end, the focus of the content for the text collection was upon gaining rich, complex descriptions of the participant's subjective experience. I used open-ended questions with the aim of gaining insight into the participants' experience of parenting in relation to their individual psychological needs. I endeavoured to be respectful and empathic, and took care to reserve judgements relating to parenting practices that might be in contradiction of personal values.



#### **4.2.3 Generating text and textual analysis**

The interviews were recorded on audio-digital recorder and transcribed verbatim in preparation for thematic analysis. The analysis involved bringing order, structure and meaning to the mass of collected text (De Vos, 2005). At the point of analysis and interpretation, the role of theory becomes important. Some scholars argue that the theory used to interpret the text must come from the text itself and from the text alone (Seidman, 2006). A differing view is that the researcher comes to the text with theoretical views, and that the theory can assist in making connections between events – what is important is that the theory is not imposed on the words (Seidman, 2006).

This study adopted the latter approach and used two levels of analysis, namely induction and deduction. An inductive approach begins with the researcher immersing herself in the text so as to identify themes that emerge naturally. In a deductive approach, the researcher uses one or more categorical themes suggested by a theoretical perspective, and the text provides a means for exploring the specified themes. In the current study, the researcher used both an



inductive and deductive approach with the aim of generating themes that added to the richness of the text and at the same time explicated the aims of the study. Firstly, themes were induced from the material, and following the initial analysis, a second level of interpretation involved considering Murray's (1938) theoretical conceptualisation of needs, and how the theory could assist in making interpretations and connections between experiences and events.

Thematic analysis offers an accessible and theoretically flexible approach to analysing qualitative text (Braun & Clarke, 2006). According to Taylor and Bogdan (1998), thematic analysis entails three distinctive activities: discovery, coding and discounting. *Discovery* is an ongoing activity and involves identifying themes and developing concepts and propositions. During the discovery process the researcher reads and re-reads the text, keeping note of emerging interpretations and ideas, and actively looks for themes, constructs and classification schemes, so as to refine an understanding of the subject matter. The text is coded to assist with refining interpretations. During the *coding* process, texts relating to major themes, concepts and interpretations are brought together, and ideas and insights refined, expanded or disregarded. *Discounting* involves understanding the text in the context in which it was collected. Text is not discarded but is interpreted in relation to the context. In the discounting phase of the process, the researcher considers issues such as whether the participant's statements were solicited or unsolicited, whether observers may have influenced the participant's disclosures, the researcher's role in the setting, and personal filters and perspectives (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998).

The researcher made every effort to apply the process outlined above. The analysis began with an intensive and repeated reading of the transcribed interviews and the researcher endeavoured to be mindful of personal assumptions and perceptions that could interfere with the text. Richards (2005) recommends keeping a log of thoughts, reflections, discoveries and conclusions throughout the analytic process. With this in mind, the researcher recorded important ideas while working with the text. The quality and consistency of interpretation was deliberated with the supervisor so as to identify and remove bias. Finally, the findings were conceptualised within Murray's (1938) need theory framework. Once the conceptual analysis of the text had been completed, the literature review process was undertaken with the aim of linking the core themes and categories with relevant academic literature.

This section discussed the research design for the study, outlining the selection of participants, interview process, text collection and analysis. The trustworthiness of the research is considered in the following section.

### 4.3 Trustworthiness

Today, many qualitative researchers argue that the criteria specified for scientific rigour in quantitative research are not appropriate for qualitative studies. In qualitative inquiry, it has become preferable, to move away from the term validity as it carries with it a positivist understanding that misconstrues how validity is defined (Eisner, cited in Butler-Kisber, 2010). Qualitative researchers prefer to evaluate their studies in terms of trustworthiness or credibility. Butler-Kisber (2010) outlines the characteristics of trustworthiness within qualitative research: a trustworthy study demonstrates credibility by including a coherent and transparent research process, and an adherence to researcher reflexivity and reflection, or a clear explanation of how the researcher accounts for assumptions and biases. In addition, it explains how the researcher is placed in the area of study, and accounts for the social and contextual influences, and how the researcher reflects on these issues on an ongoing basis.

Trustworthiness is improved when there is evidence that a length of time has been spent in the field, and there are multiple forms of field texts that can help to corroborate explanations (Butler-Kisber, 2010). It is also useful to have a breadth or range of participants so as to get different perspectives from those who know the context. A continual verification of findings and involvement of the participants in the verification process also contributes to trustworthiness. Authenticity is increased when explanations are grounded in the text, the voices of the participants are present in the work, and the researcher analyses discrepant instances. The researcher also needs to demonstrate how the work has been guided by ethical practice (Ibid).

In terms of the trustworthiness of the current study, the researcher disclosed personal orientation and subjective judgements, and maintained a prolonged engagement with the text to allow credible themes to emerge. An audit trail was created to track the research process from the beginning to the end. This documentation allowed readers to follow the development of the work and judge the trustworthiness of the outcomes.

According to Seidman (2006), in-depth interviews incorporate features that enhance the accomplishment of validity or trustworthiness. In particular, the three-interview structure places the participant's comments in context. Interviewing the participant over the course of three weeks assists in accounting for idiosyncratic days and enables the researcher to check for internal consistency of what is said. In addition, interviewing a number of participants allows experiences to be connected and compared. If the goal of the research is to understand how the participants understand their experience of the phenomenon under investigation, and if the interview process encourages the participants to make sense of themselves, then progress has been made towards accomplishing validity (Seidman, 2006).

Reliability refers to the degree to which multiple researchers would arrive at the same conclusion if they were to conduct the same study and adhere to the same procedures (Butler-Kisber, 2010). Reliability in qualitative research is a contentious topic, as qualitative methods, in contrast to quantitative methods, emphasise interpretation and individual agency (Richards, 2005). Butler-Kisber (2010) suggests that transparency and researcher reflexivity might be considered the equivalent of reliability within the qualitative paradigm. As previously mentioned, in the current study, I have accounted for and attended to the biases and assumptions brought to the study. Furthermore, the quality and consistency of interpretation was deliberated with the supervisor so as to identify and remove bias.

In this section, the characteristics of trustworthiness within qualitative research were discussed, and the processes that were applied in the current study to ensure trustworthiness were outlined. In the following section the issue of reflexivity is considered.

#### **4.4 Reflexivity**

Reflexivity is widely used in the context of qualitative research to refer to the researcher's ability to formulate a holistic understanding of their personal individual world, with the aim of understanding their personal influence on the research process. Reflexivity alerts the researcher to the need to question the prior knowledge and assumptions that they take to a study, and the many ways they influence what is recorded as text (Richards, 2005). In qualitative enquiry, no apologies are needed for assumptions and biases. Rather, what is

needed is a rigorous accounting for the researcher's assumptions and beliefs (Butler-Kisber, 2010). Reflexivity requires that the researcher accounts for personal interests, values and perspectives that have a bearing on the research process. What follows is a brief description of my background, assumptions and beliefs that have shaped the current study.

I am a 39-year old white female, living in South Africa. I have been married for 16 years and have two children, both boys, aged 6 and 8 years. I am currently completing a Masters Degree in Clinical Psychology.

I was brought up in a conventional, white, middle-class family. I was my father's only child, and my mother's third child. I have two older maternal half-brothers. I consider my parents to have offered me security and warmth, and at the same time encouraged my independence. They held strong views about what they believed to be good parenting. They were strongly opposed to the view that 'children should be seen and not heard' and I was encouraged to adopt traditional moral values.

My interest in parenting and parent-child interactions was first stimulated when I started studying psychology, and became aware of the crucial role parenting plays in the emotional and cognitive development of children. Furthermore, my personal experience of psychotherapy led me to reflect on how patterns of interaction with my mother and my father have shaped my development. Since becoming a mother, I have thought a great deal about the way in which I influence the development of my children and how I can help them to become grounded, well adjusted adults, with a healthy self-esteem.

In my own experience and from observing other parents, I am aware of the intense and powerful bond between parent and child, and the centrality of the parent's concern for their children's well-being and happiness. At the same time, I have often been struck by the thought that the way people parent in many instances is not guided by what would be beneficial for the child, but is instead driven by unconscious drives and needs of the parent, which when acted upon can be harmful to their child's development. Since becoming a mother, I have become increasingly aware of the way in which my personal needs play out in the way I parent, and I believe that self-awareness and reflexivity have helped me to become a better mother. My interest in conducting this study stems from a desire to encourage self-

awareness and reflexivity within parent-child interactions, and to further my understanding of the complexity of parenting.

Having considered the issue of reflexivity in relation to the current study, it is important to discuss the ethical considerations of the research. The following section outlines the ethical considerations of the study.

#### **4.5 Ethical considerations**

Ethical concerns were addressed throughout the research process. The guiding ethical principles included autonomy, non-maleficence and beneficence (Health Professions Council of South Africa, 2007). The research respected the autonomy of the participants by ensuring informed consent. The nature of informed consent involves providing information about the research which is relevant to the participants' decisions about whether or not to participate, making sure that the participants understand the information, and ensuring the participation is voluntary (Silverman, 2006). The participants were informed about the nature and purpose of the study and it was explained that they were free to withdraw from the research at any time. Information sheets were provided and written consent was obtained. Central to most ethical guidelines is ensuring the confidentiality of the participant's comments and behaviour (Silverman, 2006). The anonymity of the participants was maintained and information that might reveal the participant's identity was removed from the research report. Assurances were given that information obtained would remain strictly confidential. The research did not cause harm to the participants or to people in general.

More specifically, I approached the interview process with sensitivity, taking care to reserve judgements relating to parent practices that might be in contradiction of personal values. In posing interview questions, care was taken not to imply that the mother's needs might be responsible for any negative childhood outcomes for their children. The rights and dignity of the participants were respected. Regarding the principle of beneficence, the inquiry was undertaken in the hope that understanding parenting within the context of psychological needs might provide the clinician with insight into parenting problems, which could potentially translate into more effective therapeutic interventions and parental guidance. In addition, exploring parenting and psychological needs might facilitate increased self-awareness among mothers, and enhance the mother's emotional growth and development. Findings from this

study could contribute to evaluative judgements regarding the relevance of the dominant needs theories in psychology within a particular context.

#### **4.6 Summary**

The research aimed to explore parenting within the context of psychological needs by describing the mother's experience of parenting and interpreting the descriptions within a needs theory framework. As such, the inquiry suited the qualitative approach to research. This chapter outlined the methods and procedures implemented to obtain an analysis of the text, and discussed trustworthiness, reflexivity and ethical considerations. The following chapter provides the results of the research, outlining the emerging themes from the interviews with the three research participants.



## CHAPTER 5

### RESULTS

This chapter introduces the three participants in the study. The emergent themes relating to how the participants experienced their personal needs as they manifest within the parent-child relationship are outlined and explored.

#### 5.1 Participants

The following section provides a brief introduction to each participant. The purpose is to facilitate a more holistic understanding of each individual. The participants are given the pseudonyms of Jane, Lesley and Anina.

##### 5.1.1 Jane

Jane is 52 years old. She is white and middle-class. Her highest level of education is matric and she currently works as a personal assistant at an engineering consultancy firm. Jane has been divorced for five years. She has two children, a son of 17 and a daughter of 15.

Although Jane has fond memories of her childhood, it was presumably difficult as her father was an alcoholic. Jane was neatly dressed for the interviews and my impression was that she was warm and caring. On occasions, Jane seemed to experience feelings of self-doubt. She appeared unpretentious, thoughtful and considerate, and she displayed sincerity and openness during the interview process.

##### 5.1.2 Lesley

Lesley is 47 years old. She is middle-class and white. She is a business owner and holds a Masters degree. Lesley is married and has three children, twins of 15 years (a boy and a girl), and a son who is 18 years old. Lesley experienced a loving home environment as a child. However, her parents had a volatile relationship which created anxiety for Lesley. In addition, Lesley's parents were entrepreneurs and her father established and lost several businesses, which may have caused feelings of instability within the family. Lesley presented as neatly groomed and colourfully dressed. I experienced Lesley as vivacious and expressive.

She mentioned that she had been in psychotherapy for a couple of years, and it appeared that she had developed self-insight during the course of therapy. She engaged in the interview process with intensity.

### **5.1.3 Anina**

Anina is 50 years old, is middle class, and is white. Her highest level of education is standard nine and she currently works as a graphic designer and yoga teacher. She is also a volunteer lay counsellor at an NGO. Anina has two children, a daughter of 27 years who is referred to as Suzanne, and a son of 13 years, who is referred to as Wesley. Anina's first daughter, who is referred to as Emma, committed suicide in 2005, at the age of 25 years. In addition to experiencing the terrible loss of Emma, Anina's younger daughter, Suzanne, was raped during her teens. Anina is divorced and remarried two years ago. Anina experienced a difficult childhood as her mother abandoned her for a period when she was a baby, and her father died when she was seven years old. Anina attended psychotherapy for a number of years and found it to be a worthwhile process that facilitated her emotional development and increased her self-insight. During the interviews, Anina appeared welcoming, gentle and serene. Although on occasion Anina voiced a degree of ambivalence regarding some of the interview questions, indicating that they were very broad, she was an open, willing participant who engaged fully in the interview process.

## **5.2 Central themes**

This section presents the emerging themes from the analysis with extracts from the participants' transcriptions. The themes presented focus on both the commonalities arising from two or more of the participants' descriptions of their experiences, as well as distinguishing characteristics of each participant.

Themes arising from the participants' transcriptions include: the need for relatedness, the need to protect and maintain the child's safety, the centrality of the need to alleviate anxiety, conflicting needs, parenting in a manner that does not replicate negative experiences from the mother's past, not wanting the child to be the perpetrator of an experience that has been distressing for the mother, evoking and resolving prior conflicts, the child as an extension of



the mother, spiritual and religious beliefs, and replicating positive experiences. A discussion of each theme follows.

### 5.2.1 The need for relatedness

The first theme that is common to all of the participants concerns valuing their sense of relatedness to, and connection with their children. The participants appear to have a strong need for relatedness.

Being a mother provides Anina with an opportunity for close relationships with her children. She describes a need to be in touch with them, emphasising how being in touch is very important to her. It appears Anina seeks closeness and proximity with her children. She often feels that they are in touch, which appears to fulfil her need for relatedness. The fulfilment of this need leads to much joy, which is described as a celebration:

*“And that for me has always been highly significant – is wanting to be in touch with my children, and often feeling that we are in touch. And then celebrating the sense of our in-touchness.”*

She continues to communicate the significance of her need for relatedness to her children, saying that the relationship continues for the duration of life, and that the intensity of the connection is very deep and precious:

*“I suppose it’s [the relationship with one’s children] among the closer relationships, because it’s from birth to, throughout life. And so the connection [with my eldest daughter] was very deep and precious.”*

Anina’s need for relatedness to her children is strong and continuous. Her need has the potential to be fulfilled for the duration of their relationship, and the fulfilment of this need is highly cherished.

Lesley expresses how she loves people. Her need for relatedness is expressed as needing to feel connected to people:

*"The second thing that springs to mind is that I love ... I mean I love people [enthusiastically]. I have to feel connected to people."*

The need to feel connected is associated with love. Strong emotion and feelings of love are evoked by fulfilling the need for relatedness and connection. Lesley emphasises the importance of fulfilling the need for connection and relatedness, saying that she has to feel connected to people. Not fulfilling this need presumably brings anguish.

Lesley goes on to articulate how she is drawn towards people that she describes as 'incredible spirits'. She loves seeing and observing such people:

*"I have an enormous attraction towards incredible spirits and incredible, kind of love and people who are intelligent in that way. And I love to see it. I love to observe it."*

Lesley has a need to witness and experience certain people. The need manifests as an attraction and a powerful pull towards specific individuals. Fulfilling this need brings considerable pleasure.



Lesley goes on to emphasise how crucial it is for her to be able to relate to others, expressing that she can think of nothing worse than not being able to satisfy her need to interact with people and experience the joy and love that such interactions bring:

*"I can't think of anything worse than being in a world that is completely provided for, but is free of interaction and joy and love and the kind of stuff that goes with good stuff. The good stuff about human interaction."*

Lesley finds particular pleasure in witnessing how her children interact and relate. It would seem that Lesley vicariously experiences the fulfilment of the need for relatedness through her children. The fulfilment of the need for relatedness and interaction is experienced as tremendous joy:

*"And I love watching my children. I just love it. I love watching how amazing they can be around people and how they connect people and their sense of humour. I mean it just fills me up with this incredible sense of like, joy."*

Jane maintains that receiving unconditional love from her children is the most valuable aspect of being a parent:

*"Having that love, the unconditional love from them, from the children. It doesn't matter how many times I shout at them or ask them to do things, they love me. No matter who I am or what I look like, or what we're doing, or what we're going through. They will always come back and say 'I love you, Mom' or something like that."*

Jane has a need to be loved. She wants to be loved for who she is, which requires loving her despite her shortcomings. Jane's children fulfil her need to be loved as she is, and for who she is.

Lesley believes that companionship with her children alleviates the fear of being alone:

*"Probably two things, which I think are common to lots of people. One is alleviation of the fear issue [thoughtfully]. Because you go love ... why do I love somebody? Because I need companionship or I don't need companionship – because I don't want to be alone. Why don't you want to be alone? Because it's scary."*

Lesley believes that her need for companionship has arisen in part because it is frightening to be alone, and she has a need to reduce her anxiety. (Lesley also believes that her need for companionship is due to the joy it brings, as mentioned previously.) If the need for relatedness is not met, Lesley will be afraid. Her children fulfil her need to alleviate the anxiety associated with being alone. She believes that this need is common among people.

In summary, a mother's relationship with her children may serve to fulfil the need for relatedness. The need for relatedness appears to be particularly powerful and intense among the participants, and may be essential for their sense of well-being. A mother's need for relatedness manifests as seeking closeness and proximity with her children. Her need is fulfilled directly by the children, and may also be fulfilled vicariously through witnessing the experiences of her offspring. The mother's relationship with her children is seen as a particularly cherished means of fulfilling the need for relatedness. The fulfilment of the need brings intense feelings of love and joy. Due to the life-long nature of parent-child

relationships, children are seen as offering an enduring source of relatedness and pleasure for the mother. Not having the need for relatedness fulfilled may be associated with feelings of anxiety and fear. The need for relatedness may be expressed as both a pull towards others and feelings of joy, and as a flight from the anxiety and fear that is associated with being alone.

### 5.2.2 The need to protect and maintain children's safety

The second theme common to all of the participants relates to the participants' concerns over their children's safety. Each participant expresses being concerned for their children's well-being.

Anina has a need to protect her children from harm. At the same time, she believes that her need to protect her children will not necessarily be fulfilled, as she is aware that they will probably experience suffering:

*"What would I not want? Well, I mean obviously I don't want them to suffer, but I'm aware they probably will."*

Lesley's primary need regarding her children is to protect them from physical harm. She believes this is a basic human instinct for survival:

*"Obviously physical safety is a first thing. I want them to always have that – to be safe. But I think that's something you're born with – it's a natural human instinct for survival."*

Lesley believes that her need to protect her children is biologically determined, and is linked to evolutionary processes and the survival of the human species.

Jane too, expresses a need to protect her children. She would defend them and fight for them if they were threatened. Her need to protect her children could result in her risking her own safety for the safety of her children. Jane would not like her daughter to be raped or her son to be in a car accident, or involved in a fight or any crime:

*“Well, that’s quite easy for my daughter. I would hate ... wouldn’t like her to be raped. If ... that bothers me a lot, especially in this country. I’d like to protect her from that as much as I can until she’s older and she knows what ... I mean I don’t want it to happen to her ever – but I will, while she’s still the age she is, I would like her to be spared something like that. And for Andrew, he’s a very independent young boy. I can’t think of anything that ... I mean obviously a mother will, if anybody attacks my children I would defend them and I would fight for them. Obviously all the sort of things like a car accident, and being involved in a fight. I wouldn’t like him to be involved in anything like that – any crime.”*

It appears that Jane differentiates the perceived potential threats to her children based on the gender of the child.

The participants share a need to protect and maintain their children’s safety. The desire to protect may be considered a biologically determined human need that is linked to the survival of the species. The need to protect may lead a mother to risk her own need for safety in order to protect her child. It appears that the child’s gender may influence which dangers a mother perceives as most threatening. A mother may be aware that her need to protect her children may not always be fulfilled.

### **5.2.3 The centrality of the need to alleviate anxiety**

One of the participants in the study indicated that the need to alleviate anxiety may be the primary need underlying all other needs, and as such, may be the underlying motivator for parenting interactions and behaviour.

Lesley expresses the idea that a parent’s need to protect her children is related to the underlying need to alleviate fear and anxiety:

*“... that most parents have. And it’s around the fear thing. Anxiety ... that you want to protect your children.”*

Lesley believes that fear forms the root of most human behaviour. In relation to parenting, parents fear that their child will suffer, and they do not want to experience the distress of seeing their child's pain:

*"A lot of things you do with your kids are about fear. Everything's about fear."*

Lesley believes that fear is likely the root of practically all human activity. Lesley sees this as both positive and negative. The positive aspect is associated with how fear ensures the survival of the species:

*"Well, I think that fear is probably at the root of almost everything. In a positive way and in a bad way. I think that's probably the premise on which human beings have survived. I mean survival of the fittest is all about fear in some way."*

Lesley goes on to express how parents are afraid that their children will suffer and that they may cause their children harm. The fundamental concern is that a parent does not want to experience the distress of witnessing their child's pain. Lesley sees this phenomenon as an essential part of most human relationships:

*"Well, I think ... I mean, your fears are probably about your feelings [thoughtfully]. OK. Your fear that you will do something wrong, or that the child will suffer or that the child will be in emotional pain, or that ... and whether it's a result of your lack or your over whatever or something that they have done, it's actually irrelevant. I mean at the end of the day, it's all about you not wanting the experience the pain of seeing someone else's pain. I mean that's essential to most human relationships."*

It may be that Lesley perceives that the process of projection, identification and vicarious experience of suffering is the basis for nurturing, caring, compassion and empathy among people, and specifically within the parent-child relationship.

A mother's need to protect and nurture her children is associated with the underlying need to alleviate fear and anxiety. More specifically, a mother does not want to experience the pain of witnessing her child's pain and distress. The need to alleviate anxiety may be the root of all human activity, and may be connected with ensuring the survival of the human species.

### 5.2.4 Conflicting needs

Two of the participants, Jane and Lesley, experience conflicting needs within their relationships with their children. Lesley finds it difficult to address her own need for fulfilment while at the same time raising her children with a sense of commitment and responsibility:

*“It’s really difficult bringing up kids with a sense of commitment and responsibility and balancing work and providing and trying to fulfil yourself in some way. And some people seem to be more successful at it than others. I think it’s a ... hills and valleys. At some periods in your life, you’ll take better care of yourself and other periods your kids come first.”*

Lesley is attempting to address two different needs that are competing for her attention, that is, the need for self-care and the need to care for her children. There are times when her desire to care for her self is the stronger need, and she puts herself first in relation to her children. At other times her need to care for her children is stronger, and she gives priority to caring for them.

As is discussed later in this section, Lesley has established systems and processes in her home which serve to help her to manage herself and her children. These systems and processes appear to address her need for order and control. At the same time she wants to accommodate change. She finds it difficult to address these different needs:

*“How to make this one, the organised kind of ... together side ... the side where, you know, where I’ve learnt the systems, and I’ve learnt the environment and I’ve learnt the behaviours and I’ve learnt the stuff that’s good – and how to adjust all of that so that the kind of fluid forward-movement, the changing, is accommodated. But it’s the change ... it’s the movement between the two that creates anxiety because it is difficult for me.”*

It appears that Lesley values being able to respond flexibly to change. Perhaps the underlying need relating to accommodating change is for competence as a parent, or a need to protect her children by providing them with an environment that she believes is most likely to facilitate their growth. There are various underlying needs that may be influencing Lesley’s desire to be flexible. Further exploration is needed to reveal the underlying need or needs, as it is not

always possible to deduce underlying needs for parenting behaviours. Lesley's need to respond flexibly to change, and her need to maintain predictability, order and control are in conflict with each other, and they both appear to be experienced as strong needs. When Lesley accommodates change and allows room for flexibility, it appears that she has to suppress her need for order and control. As her need for a sense of control is not sufficiently fulfilled, she experiences tension and anxiety. Although allowing for flexibility creates anxiety for Lesley, she continues to try to be flexible, as she believes that it is necessary part of effective parenting. She wants to parent in a manner that she believes is most effective even if it causes her anxiety.

Jane, like Lesley, experiences conflicting needs as a parent. She does not want to be perceived as a very strict, stern mother. She wants her children to view her in a positive light, thus fulfilling her need for recognition and affirmation from her children. Jane also wants to parent effectively, which she believes involves being strict and stern. As such, Jane experiences conflicting needs, as her need for affirmation is in conflict with her desired manner of parenting:

*"Ja, because you don't want to be seen as a very strict, stern mother, but you have to be. You have to bring them up properly."*

Jane goes on to emphasise the difficulty of her struggle, expressing how hard it is for her to punish her children, as she does not want to be perceived in a negative light:

*"And it is hard you know, to punish them because you are then being seen as not a nice mum."*

Jane wants to avoid negative judgement and to be affirmed by her children. It may be that Jane fears pushing her children away through her actions, which may reflect her need for relatedness as well as affirmation.

Jane proceeds to give an additional reason for why she finds discipline a difficult aspect of parenting, saying that she feels too tired to enforce her wishes:

*"Ja. Sometimes it's... you're too tired. It's easier to give in because you're just too tired to actually just force the issue."*



Jane experiences conflicting desires regarding wanting to enforce certain behaviours with her children, and also wanting to avoid the tension and effort involved in enforcing her requests. Jane's desire to avoid tension and effort may reflect her need for rest and relaxation.

Jane believes she is too accommodating, describing herself as too soft. She suggests that because she is too accommodating, her children do not respond swiftly to her requests. Jane's expectation is that her children respond to her requests immediately, as when she was a child she responded immediately to her parents' demands:

*"I'm too soft. I think because when I was growing up if my parents told us to do something, we listened straight away. And that's what I expect from them – to listen straight away."*

Jane's desire for her children to respond quickly may reflect her need for autonomy and to be treated with respect. It seems that when Jane's children do not respond quickly, this is perceived as a threat to her sense of autonomy and self-worth.

It may be that Jane's need for affirmation, recognition and relatedness, coupled with her feelings of tiredness and desire to avoid the effort of enforcing her wishes, are interconnected with her being particularly accommodating as a parent. It is also noted that Jane's experience with her own parents has informed her expectation that her children should respond instantly to her requests. In this way, prior experiences have influenced her specific desires regarding her children's behaviour.

Jane mentions additional needs relating to her difficulties with discipline. She recalls her own experience of not enjoying doing chores as a child, and would like to spare her children having to do something she experienced as unpleasant. In this way, Jane expresses a need to protect her children. At the same time, she would like her children to experience rest and relaxation, which may reflect her need to nurture:

*"And also I think with the chores, I also ... we also had to do these chores. And I didn't want to force them to do things like that as children. I want them to be able to also just sit and relax sometimes."*

When Jane talks about discipline and punishment, she appears to express various needs, such as the need for relatedness and affirmation, the need to be competent and effective as a parent, the need for rest and to reduce tension, the need for autonomy and self-esteem, and the need to nurture and protect her children. Perhaps the complexity of Jane's feelings and needs in this regard contribute towards her experiencing discipline and punishment as particularly difficult and challenging.

There is evidence that the participants experience conflicting needs within their relationships with their children. These conflicting needs take a variety of forms. As the needs are in conflict, the mother is not able to fully address every need. The unfulfilled needs generate anxiety and tension. Some needs are stronger than others, and the intensity of different needs varies over time. It is not always possible to deduce underlying needs for observed parenting behaviours, as a certain behaviour can be motivated by different needs. There may be numerous interconnected and conflicting needs influencing parent-child interactions. The degree of difficulty experienced by a parent in a specific aspect of parenting may be interconnected with the level of complexity of the interacting and conflicting needs.

### **5.2.5 Parenting in a manner that does not replicate negative experiences from the mother's past**

All of the participants spoke of wanting to parent in a manner that did not replicate negative experiences from their past. Jane, Lesley and Anina all mention their *personal experience of being parented* in this regard. Jane and Lesley relate additional *childhood experiences*, and Jane speaks of wanting to protect her children from *various experiences that were personally distressing* for her in her more recent past. It appears that the common underlying need is to protect the child from specific circumstances that caused distress or emotional pain for parent.

#### **5.2.5.1 Perceived areas of lack within the personal experience of being parented**

As a child, Lesley had difficulty adjusting to the arrival of her sisters. She mentions that she felt shocked and irritated when her mother arrived home with a baby. In retrospect, she is aware that her parents did not help to prepare her for the arrival of her siblings, which she perceives as an oversight. She believes more communication from her parents would have helped her to adjust. If her parents had noticed her needs, they could presumably have spared her from a distressing experience:

*"And then ja – my sisters. I had difficulty, my mum says. And I remember a couple of things – those isolated memories with the birth of my second sister. She came at ... I was three. So I think that is quite a difficult time for a first child to have a sibling come in, and I remember being irritated. And of course, parents in those days, I don't know about your mum and dad, but of course, 'communication with the children - what?' You know there was no such thing as 'easing me into'. It was one day my mother came home with a baby. [Mimicking shock and irritation] 'What!?' You know, it was a shock. So ja ... so it wasn't parent culture in those days to explain things to your children. You know what I mean? You just loved them and you got on with it. So that, I think, is where the difficulty lay – lack of communication there."*

When her twins were born, Lesley was very aware of her eldest son's feelings, and took care to show sensitivity and prepare him for having siblings. Lesley did not want to repeat her parents' oversight. Her underlying need appears to be to spare her child the distress associated with the arrival of a sibling:

*"... and his [Craig, Lesley's son] issues have been, when the twins came, he had a little wobbly, at nursery school, but we sorted that out quite quickly. I was very, very aware of that. Did the whole thing that our parents never did – you know the books, and the baby's coming home, something's going to change and these are your presents when the baby gets there ..."*

It appears that Lesley would like to parent in a manner that does not replicate perceived areas of lack within her personal experience of being parented. The underlying need may be to nurture the child, to protect the child from distress and/or to be a good, competent parent. Perhaps Lesley's awareness of her personal needs and distress as a child, specifically in relation to the arrival of a sibling, is interconnected with her showing sensitivity to her own child's needs in this regard.

Anina did not receive emotional support after her father died. She believes that it would have been helpful if someone had offered her assistance and recognised her struggle. This experience is interconnected with Anina's attempt to be more attentive with her own children:

*"I suppose one thing that would have been incredibly helpful, when my father died, was someone who actually realised I needed help to get through those years at school. I think it would have made my life a hell of a lot easier, if there was some insight. And as a result with my own children I was very careful. You know whenever there were transitions or whatever, you know ..."*

Anina is aware of her personal distress when her father died, and her need for support, nurturance and understanding. It appears that Anina has a need to protect her children from such emotional pain, and this experience is interconnected with Anina being attentive to their needs in this regard.

As a mother, Anina tries to address the perceived gaps within her own experience of being parented. She aims to be more present for her children, as she experienced her mother as being uninvolved:

*"I suppose, I mean I was abandoned as a baby, so for me it's been very important that my kids always know I'm present [laughs]."*

Anina experienced the terror and pain of being abandoned. She is aware that she needed her mother to be present. This experience is interconnected with Anina placing importance on assuring her children that she is present for them. It appears that Anina has a need to protect her children from the distress of abandonment.

Anina adds that another way in which she parented differently from her mother was that she was involved with her children:

*"... where I was kind of very involved with my children."*

It appears that Anina's need for her mother to have been present is influencing her desire to be more involved with her children than her mother was with her.

In a similar vein to Anina, Jane expresses wanting to be more present for her children, as she would have liked her parents to have been more present for her:

*"I just try and be a little bit more there for my children. I think maybe my mom wasn't always there. My dad never used to go to things at the school. Plays and things. My mom used to, but my dad never did. So, maybe I try a little bit harder for my children. To be there for them when they need things."*

Jane's desire to be present for her children may reflect a need for greater affirmation of self-worth from her father and a greater sense of relatedness to him. Jane's unfulfilled desire for her father to be present in her life influences her to desire to be present for her children.

In addition to wanting her parents to be present for her, Jane would have liked more encouragement and interest regarding her schoolwork:

*"You know, my mom never really seemed to be interested in my schoolwork and I try and be more interested in the kid's schoolwork. And they never encouraged me to study or anything like that. And I try and encourage Andrew, my son, to study and try to show him how to study."*

Jane adds that she believes she may have achieved more if her parents had taken a more active role in her schooling. Because of this, she actively tries to push her children to achieve more:

*"I would have preferred it if they tried to push me a little bit. I think I might have done better if they had. But I mean it's done. It's not that important to me now. But I try and push my children. You know, if Andrew only gets fifty, I say 'No, that's not good enough, you need to do better. You can do better.' Just to push him."*

There may be a number of interconnected needs that play a part in how Jane purposefully takes a more active role regarding her children's schoolwork. Further exploration of Jane's experiences and context needs to be undertaken to gain a more definite sense of which needs are related to Jane's concern with her children's school performance. To speculate, one possibility is that Jane would have liked to have performed better at school, and her need to experience a sense of competence and achievement may have only been partially fulfilled in this regard. This experience may be dramatized in the way Jane takes a more active interest in her children's academic performance. More specifically, Jane's partially unfulfilled need for a sense of competence and achievement at school is projected onto her children and she attempts to protect her children from a similar experience. Jane's desire for her parents to

have shown a greater interest in her school work may also be related to her need for her parents to have been more affectionate and present for her, and this too, may be related to Jane's desire to take an interest in her children's schoolwork.

Jane goes on to add that she tries to provide for her children in the areas where she believes she may have lacked as a child. It appears that Jane does not want to be perceived as neglecting their needs. Perhaps this is a reflection of Jane's need for recognition and affirmation by her children that she is a good mother, as well as her need to protect her children from distress:

*"And also, in some respects, I don't think I was given some things that I wanted when I was younger, and I try and give that to my children so that they don't feel that they didn't get it from me."*

Jane further explains that she wants to be more openly affectionate with her children, as she did not receive regular physical and verbal expressions of affection and affirmation from her parents:

*"Just the physical loving mostly. And saying 'I love you' every day and often, and kissing goodbye and kissing hello, and things like that. That seems to be very important to me. I don't know if that is psychological or if that is more physical. But I feel that might have been lacking in my childhood."*

Jane wanted greater closeness and emotional connection from her parents. It appears that Jane's need for affection, relatedness and recognition was not sufficiently fulfilled as a child. Awareness of this need within herself leads her to be aware of her children's possible needs in this regard. As such, Jane wants to be affectionate with her children.

Jane goes on to communicate that when she spoke to her parents as a child, she did not experience an emotional connection with them, which she describes as an 'emotional thing'. This too, may reflect an insufficiently met need for relatedness:

*"We [Jane and her parents] spoke but weren't – when we saw them when we were older, then we would kiss them hello but as children, we didn't have that emotional thing – that we would kiss when we would go to school and kiss when we came home from school."*

Jane continues to express how affection and affirmation was something for which she longed. Seeing other children with openly affectionate parents accentuated her sadness that her parents were not as affectionate with her:

*"At some stage of my life, I think I missed it, and I used to look at my friends and think, 'Ooh, that's very nice'."*

Perhaps seeing other parents behaving differently with their children led Jane to consciously or unconsciously question her self-worth, which in turn increased her need for relatedness and recognition. It may be that recognition, affirmation and relatedness are particularly strong and enduring needs for Jane, and that the needs are particularly dominant due to her childhood experience of these needs not being sufficiently fulfilled.

Jane is surprised that she doesn't readily show physical affection towards her children, considering that she is aware that it is something that she needed as a child:

*"... but I don't even do it with my own children, which I find very strange, because, no, you would think that I would do it more because I didn't have it done [to me]."*

Jane goes on to explain that she sometimes wants to retreat from being hugged or touched by her children. Jane feels confused by her feelings, as she expects herself to enjoy the affection, particularly considering her own experience as a child:

*"The actual physical. The actual physical, ja. You know sometimes my daughter will hug me and I think, 'Oh, just don't... [stops mid sentence] Well, not don't touch me ... I'm ... I'm too busy. Leave me alone'."*

It appears that Jane was troubled by her desire to retreat from her daughter's affection, as she refrained from fully verbalising her initial thought. Perhaps, on a conscious level, Jane would like to be openly affectionate, but on a more unconscious level, her experience of a lack of physical affection while growing up has led her to be unfamiliar/uncomfortable with physical displays of affection and close emotional connection. Further exploration of Jane's

experiences would be required to gain more clarity regarding the needs which underlie Jane's discomfort. It appears that conflicting needs generate tension for Jane.

Jane goes on to verbalise that she feels happy when her daughter hugs her:

*"... [slightly troubled/confused/conflicted] but I love it when she does that though. You feel happy when she does."*

This apparent contradiction between not liking and enjoying being hugged may reflect that Jane has mixed feelings regarding physical affection, with a part of her longing for relatedness and affirmation, and another part of her feeling uncomfortable with closeness. Another possible explanation for the apparent contradiction is that Jane feels troubled or threatened by her discomfort with physical affection, and consequently focuses upon how she would like to feel.

It seems that in some instances, Jane parents in a manner that aims to address perceived areas of lack within her personal experience of being parented. Put differently, Jane's awareness of her own needs as a child lead her to be sensitive to potential needs within her children, and she actively works to address these needs within her relationship with them. In another instance, considering the physical expression of affection, it appears that although Jane wants to be sensitive to her children's needs, and respond affectionately, she finds herself unable to do this. It may be that the unresolved difficulties and insufficiently fulfilled needs within her relationship with her parents are contributing to her struggle in this regard. It may be that the need for relatedness and recognition plays a particularly strong and enduring role in shaping Jane's parenting and interactions with her children.

All the participants spoke of wanting to parent in a manner that did not replicate negative experiences from their *personal experience of being parented*. The underlying motivating need appears to be to protect the child from distress, although the need to be competent as a parent may also be a motivating factor. The mother's awareness of her personal needs and distress as a child are interconnected with the parents' awareness of the child's potential related needs. It appears that a mother may project her needs relating to distressing experiences from the past onto her children. The specific manifestation of the mothers' needs and behaviour relating to childhood experiences varies, depending on the nature of the need



and the behaviour used to fulfil the need. For example, the mother's need for relatedness may manifest as physical affection with her children, or it may manifest as spending time doing homework with them. The need for a sense of security and control may manifest as managing the children's home environment, or explaining about the arrival of a sibling. In some instances the projection may be related to sensitivity to the child's needs. (There may also be instances where unfulfilled needs are inappropriately projected onto one's children, as is explored in the following theme.) There are instances where the mother's awareness of her own experience of distress is connected with the mother aiming to fulfil the child's anticipated needs, in a manner differing from that of her own parents. There are also instances where the mother wants to parent in a manner differing from that of her parents, but struggles, or is unable to do so, and consequently repeats undesired behaviours. It may be that specific unresolved difficulties and insufficiently fulfilled needs within the mother's relationship with her parents shape parenting difficulties and struggles.

It appears that a mother may have specific dominant needs that play a relatively strong role in shaping parenting behaviour patterns. These needs may be interconnected with unfulfilled needs from the mother's relationship with her own parents.

#### 5.2.5.2 *Perceived areas of deficiency in childhood*

In addition to being aware of difficulties related to the experience of being parented, Lesley mentions other areas of perceived deficiency or lack in childhood which she does not want to replicate with their children.

Lesley experienced considerable difficulty at school as she struggled with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). Lesley emphasises the tremendous anxiety this caused her, stressing that she always struggled and didn't cope:

*"School was always, always a trial for me, always. I always felt ... because of the ADD, during primary school, I had difficulty with academics. I really, really didn't cope."*

In the school environment, Lesley's need for a sense of competence and control were not fulfilled, generating strong feelings of anxiety.

Furthermore, as nobody knew that she had difficulties with learning, nothing was done to help Lesley:

*"It was like nobody knew that I had issues with learning and, you know, any of that."*

Lesley continues to explain how her struggle to engage and function requires continual effort, and how this battle is a central part of her life. She describes her struggle with ADHD as continually trying to 'alleviate the fog', suggesting that she struggles to orientate herself and perceive her environment:

*"It is a constant search for me. I mean, my journey in terms of my ability to engage with the functions of a human being in the world revolve entirely around trying to alleviate the fog. It is a constant, constant, constant battle for me to be keeping all the balls in the air that I do."*

Lesley attempts to reduce her experience of feelings of disorientation and a lack of clarity by managing her environment:

*"I have the ADD thing – the foggiest ... and everything that transpires as a result of that has to be managed."*

Lesley has a strong need for order and control, which seems to reflect an underlying need for a sense of security.

As an adult, Lesley learned effective means of managing her ADHD, which proved to be hugely beneficial to her. In her dealings with her own children, who also have ADHD, Lesley works hard to implement systems that will help them to manage their ADHD-related difficulties:

*"Ja, but also I have an incredible sense of responsibility toward my children and toward our family unit. So things like, um, all their chores and their homework, and them understanding the maintenance of their own lives, and getting them to learn that ... like their medication, their hygiene, their organizational skills – because they are all ADD. Well, Jason has got learning disabilities as well. Very, very ADD. And um, and so what happens is that I have got all these checks and balances in place, and then they are great*

*— as long as I am there to kind of keep an eye that they are all going OK. Because you do have to, when you have a system, you have to have an overseer who checks to see that everything is working.”*

Lesley is aware of the anxiety that is generated when her need for control, security and competence is not satisfied. She is sensitive to her children's potential needs relating to their own struggles with ADHD, and she would like to protect them from the distress that she experienced. Her desire to protect and nurture her children is interconnected with her desire to establish processes and systems in the home, thereby assisting her children with understanding and managing their lives. Lesley oversees and checks on the processes in an attempt to ensure her children's well-being.

Lesley verbalises an awareness of her internal process relating to what motivates her behaviour regarding the management of her children and her home. She believes she mentally transfers some of her feelings of insecurity that are related to her struggle with ADHD onto her children, imagining that their feelings are similar to her own. This informs the action she takes to alleviate the potential anxiety they may feel:

*“ In fact, it is probably why I do it, is because that structure for me, I am probably doing transference where I am going subconsciously, where I am going ‘Well, if I felt incredibly insecure without structure and without knowledge and information, then imagine what my kids are feeling now, so I need to do this’.”*

It may be that Lesley's need for order and control is not only related to her struggle with ADHD, but may also be interconnected with her experience of instability as a child. Lesley speaks of being terrified that her parents would separate:

*“I was terrified that my parents were going to split up.”*

She explains that her parents' relationship was volatile, which she experienced as 'ups and downs', creating a sense of instability:

*“... And not understanding the dynamics of a volatile relationship, an emotionally volatile relationship, where it is up and down, up and down.”*

Lesley goes on to say that one of her needs in childhood was for a sense of security in her parents' relationship. This would have required that her parents communicate their intention to stay together:

*"... Probably security in my parents' relationship. And that would have meant that they would have had to communicate with me, which they didn't do about their relationship."*

Lesley emphasises how important it would have been to have known that her parents were not going to separate, as this knowledge would have helped her to feel more secure and less anxious:

*"That was a big thing in my childhood – that I think I would have been so much more secure and much less anxious if I'd had that information."*

She further explains that the volatility in her parents' relationship was connected with her sense that her whole world could disintegrate, and that the future was uncertain and unknown. Being told that her parents would stay together would have helped to fulfil her need for security:

*"... And that the world wouldn't disintegrate. That the future was a known entity."*

Perhaps Lesley's strong need for order and control is interconnected with her experience of insecurity in her childhood, as well as her struggle with ADHD. It may be that Lesley's ADHD symptoms, such as hyperactivity and inattention, are interconnected with her childhood experience of feeling insecure regarding the future, and that her anxiety created restlessness and interfered with her ability to concentrate.

In addition to wanting to parent in a manner that does not repeat perceived gaps within their personal experience of being parented, a mother may express other areas of perceived lack in childhood that they do not want to replicate for their children. A mother's needs that are associated at first glance with aspects of childhood outside of the parent-child relationship, on further consideration may be interconnected with unfulfilled needs within the parent-child relationship.

### 5.2.5.3 *The desire to protect children from experiences that were personally distressing*

In addition to referring to attempts to parent in a manner that does not replicate perceived areas of lack in childhood or within her personal experience of being parented, Jane, less directly, expresses a need to protect her children from other experiences that have been distressing for her. Jane talks about struggling with some of the practical demands of being a single parent, such as having to fix things that are broken in the home. Jane would like her daughter to be competent in practical home maintenance so that she does not experience the worry and fear that Jane experienced regarding not being able to do practical home-related tasks. This seems to reflect Jane's need for autonomy, independence and control:

*"I want to also ... she doesn't do much like fixing windows and things like that now – but when I do ... she has helped me. I fixed windows myself because without a man in the house you have to do these things. And I get her to try and help me – show her and tell her because I never knew how to fix a window. I don't know how to fix taps. So when I find out I show her and I tell her, 'This is how you do it', so that she's prepared. When she is older one day and on her own, she will know how to do these things."*

Jane expresses that her strong need for independence and control influences her parenting. She stresses that her daughter must be able to do certain tasks, and that she encourages her daughter to be competent and independent:

*"... but if she is on her own and she's living on her own, she must know how to do these things [practical home maintenance]."*

Jane explains that she was afraid when she had to learn to do practical tasks on her own:

*"Because for me it was hard learning these things. I was scared. I was too scared to try things."*

In addition, Jane does not want her children to experience the hurt of a broken marriage. She wants her children to be able to recognise a truly loving relationship:

*"... and also to know the difference between love and just a feeling whether it is real love or not real love."*

Jane goes on to say that she had thought that she was in love, but ended up being very hurt by her ex-husband. In retrospect, she recognises that she was responding to her need for relatedness and affirmation, while misjudging the nature of the relationship:

*"Because you sometimes think that you are in love and you go off and have a huge relationship with somebody and then they hurt you. And you would have believed that you were really in love with that person. In the meantime, it might have just been a bit of an infatuation or, because that person was showing you attention, you felt it was love, but it wasn't really actual love."*

It seems that Jane suddenly gains insight into how her parenting is influenced by her need to protect her children from a specific distress that she had experienced:

*"Well, I only just thought of that now."*

She believes she might be unconsciously aiming to parent in a manner that protects her children from a hurtful romantic relationship. She understands the unconscious process to be something that happened without her thinking about it:

*"That maybe I am trying to do that without even thinking."*

Jane's need to protect her children manifests as attempting to prepare them for relationships:

*"... To prepare them for relationships so that they don't get hurt, so that they know the difference."*

Considering Jane's difficult relationship with her husband and her subsequent divorce, it seems that Jane would particularly like to protect her children from experiencing the distress of an unhappy marriage, as this is something she herself has found distressing. It appears that Jane was not fully conscious of her desire for her children not to be hurt in a romantic relationship until talking about the issue during the interview. It seems that upon reflection, Jane became aware that she may not always be fully conscious of her underlying feelings, motivation and needs regarding different aspects of being a parent.

In considering Jane's need to protect her children, it appears that Jane gives particular attention to protecting her children from experiences that have been distressing or unpleasant for her. Put differently, within the parenting context, it appears that Jane's unfulfilled or partially fulfilled psychological needs are expressed as a need to protect her children from experiences where Jane's own needs have been thwarted or not fully met.

Each of the participants in the study tries to parent in a manner that does not replicate negative experiences from their past. The participants are aware of certain instances where this process manifests. In some instances, the participants may not be fully aware or conscious of this process.

### **5.2.6 Not wanting the child to be the perpetrator of an experience that has been distressing for the mother**

In addition to parenting in a manner that does not replicate negative experiences from the mother's past, one of the mothers spoke of not wanting her child to perpetrate an experience that has been personally distressing for her.

Jane would like her son to be a good husband. Upon reflection, she believes that this may be important to her as her father was not a very good husband to her mother:

*"And especially for Andrew, will be a good husband to his wife. That he'll help her and be able ... and I'm trying to teach him to ... to cook, to do dishes, to clean floors, to do washing, so that he can't ... won't one day be married and say, 'Oh, I can't do those things', or he'll sit and make his wife make coffee and tea and all of that. That he will be a caring husband."*

Jane is troubled by the way in which her father treated her mother. It appears that Jane would have liked her mother to have received greater support from her father, and she does not want her son to be similarly unsupportive in his relationships:

*"[Thoughtfully]. Maybe because my father wasn't, I don't think, a very good husband."*

It appears that Jane has a need to stop her son from repeating a situation that was upsetting for her. Her need appears to be vicariously interconnected with her mother's experience of a lack of support and care from her husband. Jane perceives her son as potentially having the same negative characteristics as her father. She identifies with her mother's need for support and care, and projects these needs onto her son's potential partners. She appears to vicariously identify with his potential partner's distress, while imagining that her need for support and care will not be fulfilled. It may also be that Jane experienced a lack of support from her ex-husband, and that this too, contributes to her sensitivity to a partner's needs. It appears that Jane has a need to protect any potential partner of her son's from an experience that was distressing for her, and that this need may influence her parenting.

In addition to a mother parenting in a manner that seeks to protect her children from distress, a mother may also aim to parent in a manner that inhibits her child from causing distress to others. The mother's specific concerns are interconnected with experiences that were personally distressing for her. Potential similarities between perpetrators of distress from the mother's past may be projected onto her children. In this way, a mother may be expressing needs related to a prior experience through her desire for her children not to perpetrate an experience that was distressing for her.

#### **5.2.7 Evoking and resolving prior conflicts: The satisfaction of addressing unfulfilled needs through parenting**

One of the participants indicated that different stages and events within the child's life may evoke the mother's recollections of related experiences, unfulfilled needs and prior conflicts. In some instances, experience within the mother-child relationship appears to contribute to resolution of the mother's prior conflicts.

Anina responded to her mother's way of parenting by parenting in a relatively conservative manner, which differed from that of her mother. Anina expresses that she likes parenting differently to her mother. She believes that some of her mother's rules were driven by self-interest and the desire to maintain a particular lifestyle, rather than being in the interest of the parent-child relationship. It appears that Anina derived pleasure from parenting in a way that addressed perceived gaps within her own experience of being parented:



*"Ja, so then I responded to that [how Anina's mother engaged with her]. Became, in her mind I was very conservative. And I liked being conservative, relatively speaking, about how I brought my kids up, but I'm sure compared to other people I wasn't. When I say conservative, my mum was really into living her own life very freely and not having her style cramped by having children around. At the same time she imposed certain rules which I suppose helped that, like 'children are to be seen and not heard' and so on."*

Perhaps Anina's reference to *liking* parenting differently to her mother reflects the notion of vicarious experience through one's children. By giving her children the nurturing that she needed as a child, she may vicariously experience the fulfilment of this need, which brings joy and pleasure. It may be that there is an element of vicarious experience in all of the participants' accounts of parenting in a manner that does not replicate negative experiences from their past. Perhaps vicarious experience is connected with identifying with the child and sensitively empathising with the child's needs.

Anina believes that aspects of her relationship with her mother did not work for her, and she tries to do things differently with her children. She expresses the desire to make things better. Perhaps this desire reflects a need to repair past hurts and / or a need for her children to have positive, constructive experiences within the mother-child relationship:

*"Thinking ... kind of a sense of that didn't work, so it feels as if it should have been done differently. So trying to do it ... make things better I suppose."*

Anina adds that childhood experiences can lead parents to parent in a manner that attempts to correct areas of difficulty that they experienced within their relationship with their parents. She describes this process as involving fixing things for one's children:

*"I once heard a saying of 'You don't learn...' Let me just try and remember. 'Your children...' because you basically ... my sense is that you kind of react almost to what happened in your own childhood, so you're kind of fixing things for your children."*

Anina provides an example of this process from her own experience. She explains that she did not receive support from her school when her father died, and she experienced the school

institution as unsupportive and 'terrible'. In this way, her need for support, nurture and protection were not met:

*"... like my father died and I think I mentioned it, and there was absolutely no assistance from the school, and no one could see I was struggling. No one seemed to see it. I'm sure they knew it at some level. But there was no assistance."*

Anina felt very distressed when her children first went to school, as she believed she was abandoning them to a terrible system. It appears that her children's transition to school evoked Anina's prior distress associated with being abandoned. Anina was delighted to realise that her children's experiences at school differed from her own, and to see that she was projecting her struggles inappropriately onto her children. When Anina witnessed her children's enjoyment of school, it appeared she vicariously experienced their pleasure. Her delight may have been amplified by the relief she experienced in the knowledge that her children were not distressed:

*"But as a result of this, when I took my kids to school, each one of them, I cried all the way home, because I felt I was abandoning them to this terrible system [laughs]. And was delighted with each one when they came home and loved their school experience, and each one made me feel so happy. And I saw them not only relatively happy at school, but thriving at school. So it was like 'Phew!' [Laughs]."*

Anina goes on to verbalise her insight into the process that unfolded. It appears that Anina became aware of the subconscious process of projection in her relationship with her children. She wonders whether this process is automatic and common among parents:

*"I really wanted them not to, I suppose, to be simplistic about it, suffer in the areas where I had struggled. So it's a huge projection, that kind of, I suppose, might automatically happen to parents, I don't know [pondering]. We have our experiences and then perhaps project them onto our children and the issues don't end up being their issues."*

Anina reflects that much of the way she parents may have been influenced by such a process of projection:

*"So parenting and... ja, so I suppose a lot of the way I parented has been like, almost I suppose trying to make amends what happened in my own experiences. And then kind of a growing of some wisdom, seeing, 'Oh, but it doesn't necessarily apply'. And being delighted that I want to fix this, but it's not their issue."*

Anina describes trying to make amends for what happened in her own experience, implying that in some ways she may be living vicariously through her children and attempting to repair her past hurts. On recognising that in some instances, her children are not struggling with similar needs, Anina is delighted that they are not suffering in the way she suffered. It appears such knowledge satisfies her desire to protect and maintain the safety of her children.

It appears that a mother's unfulfilled needs can be satisfied vicariously through witnessing the experiences of her children. As a mother witnesses different stages of her child's life, each stage may evoke recollections of the mother's experiences at the same stage when she was a child. In this way, a mother's unfulfilled needs from childhood may re-emerge as her children pass through a related transition. A mother may become aware of the way in which her recollections of her own experiences as a child are evoked through witnessing her children's experiences, and gain awareness of the unconscious process of projection within her relationship with her children. The mother's recognition that her children are not experiencing similar struggles brings a feeling of joy and relief which may be interconnected with vicariously satisfying the mothers' unmet needs through her child. A mother may perceive that she has been trying to amend some of the hurts from her past through her children.

#### **5.2.8 The child as an extension of the mother and the need for recognition, affirmation and achievement**

Two of the participants in the study indicated that a child may be seen as an extension of the mother.

Jane would like her children to adopt the personal characteristics that she herself displays which she believes are valuable and important. Jane would like her children to be perceived by others as she would like herself to be perceived. In particular, Jane would like her children to be self-sufficient, well grounded and perceived by others to be loyal and responsible:

*"I think also the way I am teaching them to be self-sufficient and well grounded. And, because to me it is important for me to be like that. So I think that is maybe why I stress it so much, because it is very important for me to be thought of as a loyal, responsible person. And so, because I feel the need that I need to be thought of like that, my children must also be thought of like that. And I want them to be like that. So I think that is the way ... why I bring them up the way I do."*

Jane expresses that her desire for her children to be perceived in a certain light influences the way she parents.

Jane further explains how important it is for her to treat all people as equals and not to be racist, which she refers to as not seeing colour. When she witnesses her children with black friends, which she perceives as an indication of treating people equally, she feels proud:

*"... but I have, don't see colour, but everybody is the same to me. I mean obviously I see colour because I was brought up in the apartheid era, but my children have black friends and they certainly don't see colour. And now I am very proud that they are like that."*

It would seem that by witnessing her children's positive characteristics, Jane's personal need for positive affirmation and recognition is satisfied, which in turn enhances her feelings of self-worth. It appears that her children are experienced as an extension of herself, because receiving recognition for her children's perceived attributes is gratifying for Jane. It may be that Jane subconsciously seeks to vicariously satisfy her need for affirmation and recognition through her children,

Lesley believes that parents see their children as an extension of themselves. She verbalises her awareness of this process, explaining that if a child is perceived in a positive light, the parent perceives this as a reflection of their own positive attributes. Lesley feels that her children can serve to boost her own self-esteem in this manner, as if they grow up to be competent adults, she feels she has been a good parent:

*"... is probably that they [Lesley's children] fulfil some kind of ego thing in me, that it's ego stroking for me. That if they are these lovely people, then they are an extension of Nick and I, which is how parents always see their children. Ag, it's the same with*

*anybody, your friends, your family, your mother, they are an extension of you. You know what I mean? So ja, that's probably also ... that I've done the job well enough and that there's something ... um you know the nature/nurture thing. You know on both levels ... I can't be all that bad. You know what I mean? Nick and I have made these fabulous kids and we have managed to nurture them to this point. There's an ego stroking for you."*

It seems that by perceiving her children as an extension of herself, Lesley's children can address her need for recognition and competence.

It seems that mothers fulfil their need for recognition and achievement by witnessing their children's perceived valuable attributes and hearing others speak of their children's positive characteristics. As such, a mother may vicariously fulfil her need for affirmation through her children. A mother may believe that parents view their children as an extension of themselves. They may either be aware of the process of projection and vicarious experience of affirmation through their children, or the process may be subconscious and unrecognised.

### 5.2.9 Spiritual and religious beliefs

An additional theme that emerged from the text is that unconscious emotional needs may unconsciously shape a mother's spiritual convictions. These spiritual beliefs consequently influence how the mother interacts with her children.

Anina's spiritual beliefs are interconnected with the way in which she perceives her children's lives. She speaks of perceiving everything from a spiritual perspective:

*"For me everything's linked to my spiritual beliefs [laughs]."*

Anina goes on to stress how she sees everything from a spiritual viewpoint. She believes that everything in life is as it is meant to be:

*"I feel I am very tuned into the spiritual, and see everything that way. So people would be like talking about career and ... or sitting it traffic waiting to get somewhere. Whereas I know the traffic is not moving because it is not meant to be moving. And if I am not*

*earning money, it is meant to be like that right now. Like everything ... acceptance that everything is as it should be, kind of thing [laughs]."*

Anina emphasises that it is important for her to accept her circumstances, and not attempt to hastily change her situation. Rather, she is meant to experience whatever she is experiencing:

*"So, it's not about trying to fast-forward because I am not meant to be there. I am meant to be where I am."*

Anina adds that the purpose of life is to learn:

*"Life to me ... that's why we are here. We are here to learn. There is no other reason. No reason at all [laughs]."*

Anina's beliefs regarding her children's lives reflect her personal spiritual beliefs. She believes that whatever transpires in her children's lives brings valuable learning. Anina would like her children to live in the moment. She is accepting of whatever unfolds and does not wish for circumstances and situations to be different:

*"... whatever people experience, they need to experience. Like Wesley right now. He needs to go through all this to learn what he's going to learn from it, and so on. So I just, ja, want them [her children] to be in the moment and be where they are. I don't have a thing of wishing for difference, anything different. Because I really do accept things as they ... that things are the way they need to be in any moment. Otherwise they wouldn't be like that. Ja, so I don't have kind of superimposed desires."*

Anina believes that her spiritual beliefs are interconnected with all the areas of her life, including parenting. The question arises as to whether Anina's religious and spiritual beliefs are interconnected with her emotional needs. It may be that Anina's needs are subconsciously influencing her religious convictions, and consequently influencing her perceptions and needs regarding her children. It is possible Anina's belief that everything in life is as it is meant to be may be a defence against experiencing the world as unsafe and unpredictable. It could be that the suffering Anina experienced as a child, including being abandoned and losing her father, as well as the losses she experienced in later life with her children, may have given her a sense that the world is frightening, threatening and dangerous. Needing a basic sense of

safety and security, Anina's defence may be to believe that there is purpose in suffering, and that life unfolds as it is meant to unfold. It may be that Anina's belief that everything in life is as it is meant to be, is a way of coping with the feelings of terror and helplessness which she has experienced. This belief may help her to accept painful experiences and enhance her sense of security and well-being. It is also acknowledged that Anina's beliefs may not be defensive, but may have evolved from a process of learning and the development of self-awareness.

To discuss another example of the way in which beliefs may be interconnected with emotional needs, Anina has a desire not to impose or intrude on her children's lives. She links this need with her spiritual beliefs. She believes that life is sacred and she does not want to intrude or impose upon her children's journey through life:

*"They've [my children] had many lives, they'll have many others. I'm one of many thousands of mothers that they've had, and they, maybe they've been my mother at some point, and so on. So it's this very sacred being that's coming in. And which is also why you don't intrude on this journey that they're having."*

It appears that spiritual meaning may provide Anina with an explanation for the way in which she chooses not to impose her will on her children:

*"[Laughs]. I would not want them to have me imposing on them [laughs]."*

Anina goes on to express how she experienced intrusion and invasiveness as a child:

*"I would watch them [her mother and siblings] all in this kind of co-dependent thing and just think I want nothing to do with this."*

There may be various needs that are subconsciously influencing Anina's conviction that it is important not to intrude on her children's lives. One possibility is that as Anina experienced a lack of respect for boundaries when she was a child, her attempts not to encroach on her children's boundaries are an unconscious reaction to the sense of intrusion and imposition that she experienced within her family of origin.

Anina says that, due to the intrusion and invasiveness she experienced as a child, she particularly valued having her boundaries respected by her therapist:

*"Well, I suppose because of my ... the invasiveness I've experienced with child boundaries ... she [Anina's therapist] completely kept the therapist relationship in place, which I totally valued [grateful tone]."*

She goes on to emphasise how important it was for her to feel that her boundaries were not going to be invaded:

*"It was a big thing for me. It just made me feel that this person's never going to invade my boundaries ..."*

The desire to respect and protect boundaries may reflect Anina's need for respect and autonomy. It appears that these needs were not adequately fulfilled in her relationship with her mother. By not imposing her will on her children, Anina may unconsciously desire to fulfil her children's potential need for respect and autonomy, and protect them from the distress that she felt when these needs were not met.

While it is argued that subconscious emotional needs unconsciously shape a mother's spiritual convictions and the way in which she interacts with her children, it is acknowledged that a mother's beliefs may not be connected to subconscious or defensive processes. Beliefs may evolve from a process of learning and developing self-awareness, and, as such, may represent perceived personal truths about life. However, in relation to the current study, it is noted that various emotional needs may unconsciously influence spiritual beliefs, which consequently shape parent-child interactions. Distressing experiences from a mother's past appear to activate specific needs in this regard.

#### **5.2.10 Replicating positive experiences**

Two of the participants in the study indicated that a mother may attempt to replicate experiences for her children that she herself has experienced as pleasurable. Both Jane and Lesley speak of encouraging and replicating positive experiences from their past within their current family.



Lesley would like to encourage a family and extended family culture as it is something that she has enjoyed.

*"I think that Nick [Lesley's husband] and I both, him because of negative experience and me because of positive experiences, we encourage a kind of family and extended family culture. That's a big thing."*

Lesley is aware of the pleasure that family interactions brought to her. In this instance, it appears that Lesley is drawn towards the experience of pleasure, rather than primarily aiming to avoid anxiety and distress. She would like to replicate enjoyable experiences for her children. Lesley is not driven by a desire to address an insufficiently fulfilled need, but rather parents in a manner that seeks sources of pleasure.

Jane remembers how she enjoyed playing as a child. She would like her own children to have the same pleasurable experiences:

*"I can just remember playing, and playing, and having fun, and playing in the garden, and playing in the mud. Making mud pies and things ... can see your face [looking at the interviewer, smiles]. To think today, my children the other day, when they were little, started playing in the mud with the hosepipe and you want to tell them, 'Stop it!' and then you think, 'What are they doing? They are just playing with mud.' And I remember that – playing in the mud."*

Jane appears to identify with her children wanting to play in the mud. She suppresses her desire to stop them from making a mess, so that they can experience pleasure in the same way that she did as a child. It appears that Jane is drawn towards replicating positive experiences in her own childhood for her children, and she vicariously experiences the satisfaction of their need for pleasure and play.

That her children should be self-aware is one of Lesley's main desires. She would like them to develop an understanding of their needs and desires so that they can consciously make decisions about the way in which they plan to create the kinds of experiences that make them happy, peaceful and content. This requires an awareness of their own idea of a pleasurable

day, the type of people they want to connect with and the manner in which they want to engage with work. Lesley wants to help them to know themselves, and wants to assist them in building a plan to create what they wish to experience:

*"It would be about living every day, the way they want to live it [slowly]. Going into adulthood with a conscious mental description of how a day looks for them, and knowing that that's what they need to look for – and not the job, the money, the lifestyle, the whatever, that they need to ... If I can get them to a point where they know themselves, and they know what it is that makes them contented or peaceful or happy or in a day. Not in general. Not at Christmas or for a birthday present or as an interest or a passion, but how would you like to spend your day? Who would you like to be with? What kind of people do you want to be around? How much do you engage with work? What do you want to do? And then from that, try to help them build a plan for how it is that they want ... what kind of day they want to experience."*

Lesley goes on to say that without self-knowledge, a person may invest much time engaging in activities that they mistakenly think will be beneficial, but ultimately do not bring happiness:

*"But you can certainly do things that you think you should be doing or things you thought you wanted to do, and then take years, or months or whatever to discover that actually no, that's not really what you need, to make you happy. It's about an awareness ... a self-awareness. I want them to be conscientised – I want them to have a really well developed sense of self-awareness."*

Although Lesley does not directly refer to her personal experience of increasing emotional awareness in relation to her children, it may be that Lesley's process of emotional growth and increasing awareness has informed her desire for her children to benefit from a process that has been important and beneficial for her.

In summary, from these case studies, a mother may attempt to replicate experiences for her children that she herself has experienced as pleasurable. In these instances, it appears that the mother is not motivated by a desire to address an insufficiently fulfilled need, but rather parents in a manner that seeks sources of pleasure for her children. This may reflect how the mother vicariously experiences pleasure and need fulfilment through her children.

This chapter introduced the three participants in the study, and discussed the emergent themes relating to how the participants experience their personal needs as they manifest within the parent-child relationship. The following chapter discusses the results of the study in relation to the relevant literature.



## CHAPTER 6

### DISCUSSION

*"Sweater, n.: garment worn by child when its mother is feeling chilly".*

*(Bierce, n.d.)*

In this chapter the results of the study are discussed in relation to relevant literature. The themes are discussed in relation to Murray's theory of needs (Murray, 1938; Murray & Shneidman, 1981) and with reference to further relevant research.

#### 6.1 The need for relatedness

With regard to the category 'the need for relatedness', the most notable result was that a mother's relationship with her children plays a part in fulfilling the need for relatedness. Considering how this finding relates to Murray's theory of needs, Murray (1938) includes the need for affiliation (which can be referred to as the need for relatedness) on his list of psychogenic needs, denoting the need to make associations and friendships. As Murray's list does not represent a fixed hierarchy, no particular relevance is given to this need. However, applying Murray's theory, it can be interpreted that the need for relatedness is strong among the mothers in the study, and finds expression within the mother-child relationship.

The results also revealed that the mother's need for relatedness can manifest as a powerful attraction towards her children and seeking a closeness and connection to them. From Murray's perspective, it can be interpreted that a *need integrate* (see 3.3.2.8, p. 45) exists, whereby fulfilling the need for relatedness is associated with the mother seeking proximity to her children.

It was noted that the mother-child bond is seen as a particularly cherished means of fulfilling the need for relatedness. Although Murray does not consider this phenomenon, the need for

relatedness, which may be referred to as the need for belonging or affiliation, has stimulated considerable research (Deckers, 2004). Numerous theorists (e.g. Maslow, 1970; Nikitin & Freund, 2008; Sheldon, Elliot, Kim, & Kasser, 2001; Stevens & Fiske, 1995) have concluded that the need for relatedness is a central human need. Research relating specifically to the need for relatedness supports the findings of the study regarding the significance of the need for relatedness, but does not consider the particular importance of the fulfilment of this need within the parent-child relationship.

However, attachment theory supports this result by highlighting the significance of the attachment and care-giving systems, and the way in which the mother-child relationship plays an important role in fulfilling both the child's and mother's need for relatedness (Pittman & Zeigler, 2007). From an attachment theory perspective, people need to experience a connectedness and relatedness to others for social and emotional development to occur normally. In addition, studies exploring how parents respond to their children have shown that physical contact, touch and smiling are very important for the mother, enabling her to feel a closeness and relatedness to her child (Dallos, 2006). Research regarding mothers' experience of parenting also reveals that a mother's need for relatedness may be fulfilled within the mother-child relationship (Nicolson, 1999; Raeff, 1996; Wells, Hobfoll, & Lavin; 1999). Thus, there is support for the research finding that the need for relatedness is particularly powerful and that the mother's relationship with her children is an important means of fulfilling this need.

The results showed that fulfilling the need for relatedness, as expressed within the mother-child relationship, may be associated with avoidance of feelings of anxiety and fear associated with being alone. The need for relatedness may also be experienced as a pull towards feelings of joy and pleasure. Applying Murray's theory (Murray, 1938; Murray & Shneidman, 1981), the need for relatedness may be experienced as both an avoidant need and an approaching need (see section 3.3.2.7).

The results showed that the need for relatedness may be expressed in different ways within the parent-child relationship. For instance, in addition to proximity seeking, the need for relatedness may underlie a mother's avoidance of limit setting, in case this becomes a threat to the mother-child bond. Murray's theory (Murray, 1938; Murray & Shneidman, 1981) supports this finding, noting that needs manifest in various forms of expression and

behaviour. There are probably many different ways in which the need for relatedness will play out in mother-child interactions. The current study provides a glimpse into possible manifestations with the three participants.

An additional theme concerned the notion that the mother's need for relatedness may be fulfilled vicariously through witnessing the experiences of her offspring. Although Murray does not refer to the vicarious experience of need fulfilment, for many years psychologists have been interested in vicarious emotional responses (e.g. Adler, 1997; Eisenberg, Fabes, Carlo, & Troyer, 1992; Hafkenschied, 2005; Hernández, Engstrom, & Gangsei, 2010; Ocejá, López-Pérez, Ambrona, & Fernández, 2009). However, the majority of research relates to either vicarious experiences of trauma, or vicarious learning. There is very little research on the vicarious experience of positive experiences, and no studies were found on positive vicarious experience within the mother-child relationship. A literature search reveals that the closest related topic to receive attention is the experience of empathy, which is associated with vicarious processes (e.g. Ocejá, López-Pérez, Ambrona, & Fernández, 2009).

## 6.2 The need to protect and maintain children's safety

The results clearly indicated that the participants share a need to protect and maintain their children's safety. The need to protect may lead the mother to risk her own need for safety in order to protect her child. From the perspective of Murray (1938), it may be interpreted that the need for *nurturance* (described as the need to protect the helpless), is experienced strongly within the mother's relationship with her children. The mother's need for nurturance for her children can be stronger than her need for personal *harm avoidance*. The need is experienced as a *reactive need* (see section 3.3.2.6, p. 44), i.e. involving a response to a perceived threat in the environment. The environmental press of threat (see section 3.3.2.12, p. 47) stimulates the mother's need for nurturance for her children. Thus, a *thema* exists (see section 3.3.2.12, p. 47): a threat to offspring results in activation of the nurturance need within the mother, giving rise to protective behaviour towards the child.

In terms of additional research, the finding that the mothers share a need to protect their children is supported by attachment theory. The care-giving behavioural system of Bowlby (1969/1982, 1973) refers to the motivational system of the parents to give care and protection

(Mayseless, 2006). The care-giving behavioural system is perceived as being driven by the parents' need to protect and care for their children.

The results indicated that a mother may believe that the desire to protect is a biologically determined human need that is linked to the survival of the species. Murray (1938) was not concerned about whether a need was learnt or innate, but rather sought to uncover needs so as to understand the person. However, in line with the psychodynamic thinking of his time, he considered that some needs may be biologically determined. Further research (e.g. Corter & Fleming; 2002; Mayseless, 2006; Solomon & George, 2006) supports the result that the desire to protect may be considered a biologically determined human need, that is linked to the survival of the species. George and Solomon (1999) suggest that the function of the care-giving behavioural system is the survival of the young, with the primary goal of ensuring the child's safety. The system is activated by the infant or child's distress, or the caregiver's perception of danger to the child. A crucial feature of the care-giving system is that if the parent has experienced normal, healthy development, threat and danger should activate care-giving and protection toward the child (Solomon & George, 2006). Corter and Fleming (2002), in their review of evolutionary theory and parenting, outline the way in which many of the fundamental functions that human parents serve for their infants, such as protection, are common to other species. Thus, research supports the view that the need to protect one's offspring is biologically determined.

The themes suggest that a mothers' perception of the most threatening dangers to her children may be gender specific. A mother may specifically not want her daughter to be raped, or her son to be in a car accident, involved in a fight, or affected by crime. While there is support for this finding relating to the broader aspect of the gender of one's offspring influencing parenting (Karraker & Coleman, 2005; Mayseless, 2006), no studies were found that specifically explore the threats perceived by the mother that are associated differentially, according to the gender of the child. Perhaps Murray's concept of alpha (real) and beta (perceived) press (Murray, 1938) (see section 3.3.2.12) can be applied to the finding that the gender of the child can influence which dangers the mother perceives as most threatening. Although there may be specific threats that differentially relate to gender, perhaps a mother's differentiation based on gender is in part an issue of perception. Considering how perceptions form, Murray believed that much of what is internalised within an organism was once external, in the broader environment (Allen, 2003). A mother's perceptions are established

within a socio-cultural system. As such, a mother's perception of different threats relating to each gender are likely shaped by myriad forces, ranging from personal experiences within the family of origin, to experiences within the broader social context. There is support for this interpretation of Murray's theory relating to needs and press from current research (Okagaki & Bingham, 2005). Okagaki and Bingham (2005) stress how it is important to consider the ways in which broad contextual factors may shape beliefs, attitudes and perceptions relevant to child rearing.

The results from the case studies revealed that a mother may be aware that her need to protect her children may not always be fulfilled. From Murray's (1938) perspective, when a need is activated, the individual experiences tension, and fulfilment of the need involves reduction of the tension. The awareness that a need may not be fulfilled may indicate an activation of the need, indicating tension and anxiety.

### **6.3 The centrality of the need to alleviate anxiety**

The results revealed that a mother's need to protect and nurture her children is associated with her underlying need to alleviate fear and anxiety. More specifically, a mother does not want to experience the pain of witnessing her child's distress. Building on this notion, a mother may believe that the need to alleviate anxiety may be the root of all human activity, and as such, is connected with ensuring the survival of the human species. Murray's theory does not support the notion that the root of all behaviour concerns the alleviation of anxiety. Although Murray (1938) maintained that the fulfilment of needs reduces tension, he also proposed that certain activities are performed purely for the satisfaction gained from engaging in the activity. In addition, Murray (1959) stressed the more positive characteristics of the individual, maintaining that creativity is an inherent human disposition.

Although the theory of Murray (1938) does not support the finding that the need to alleviate anxiety may be the root of all human activity, some theorists (Becker, 1973; Freud, 1923/1961; Pyszczynski, Greenberg, & Solomon, 2000) consider needs to be primarily defensive in nature, and solely related to managing anxiety and reducing tension. For example, terror management theory (Pyszczynski, Greenberg, & Solomon, 1997, 2000) assumes that self-preservation is the primary need underlying all other needs, and that the



self-preservation instinct directs all behaviour. Other theorists such as Deci and Ryan (2000) and Maslow (1970) have defined the concept of needs differently. Deci and Ryan (2000) consider needs to be associated with growth and fulfilment, proposing three basic human needs, namely, autonomy, competence, and relatedness. A review of literature reveals that there is no consensus regarding the existence or nature of fundamental, primary needs, and whether or not the need to reduce anxiety is the root to all human activity. Hence, different researchers either support or dispute the idea that a mother's need to protect and nurture her children is associated with her underlying need to alleviate fear and anxiety.

#### **6.4 Conflicting needs**

The results revealed that the participants' experience conflicting needs in their relationships with their children, and that the conflicting needs take a variety of forms. Murray (1938) supports the research results regarding conflicting needs, insofar as he proposes that a conflict of needs occurs when needs oppose each other. Moreover, the participants experienced anxiety and tension in aspects of parenting where they experienced conflicting needs. There is support for this finding from Murray (1938), who proposes that such conflict may give rise to distressing dilemmas. The study showed that there may be numerous interconnected and conflicting needs that influence parent-child interactions, and that the degree of difficulty experienced by a parent in a specific aspect of parenting may be interconnected with the level of complexity of the interacting and conflicting needs. There seems to be no literature exploring the numerous interconnected and conflicting needs which influence parent-child interactions, and the degree of difficulty experienced by a parent in parenting.

The results indicated that in aspects of parenting where a mother experiences conflicting needs, she may experience a variation in the intensity of different needs over a period of time. Murray's concept of prepotency (Murray, 1938; Murray & Shneidman, 1981) appears to apply to this experience and to support this result. The theory proposes that needs differ in terms of the urgency with which they impel behaviour.

## 6.5 Parenting in a manner that does not replicate negative experiences from the mother's past

The mothers experienced a strong desire to prevent negative experiences from their own past being repeated in the lives of their children, with the underlying need being to nurture and protect the child from distress, although the need to be competent as a parent may also be a motivating factor. In many instances, the mothers were successful in their attempts not to replicate negative experiences in the lives of their children. Support for this finding is offered by Harkness, Super, and Keefer (1992). The authors proposed that parenting is influenced by childhood in four ways (see section 2.2.4.5), with one of the means being that a parent who identifies negative experiences in their childhood may set goals to actively avoid similar experiences in the lives of their own children. In a comparable vein, referring specifically to the parent-child relationship, Snarey (1993) showed that fathering, in part, involved reworking the negative aspects of the father-son relationship which the father had experienced with his own father.

The finding that mothers do not want to replicate previous negative experiences in their relationship with their children is explored further under the following sub-headings: projection; conscious and unconscious needs; repeating the past; unresolved conflicts, unfulfilled needs and parenting difficulties; the variety of thema, and the complexity of parenting; and, the interpretive nature of the findings.

### 6.5.1. Projection

All the mothers had a strong desire to parent in a manner that did not replicate negative experiences from their past. In this regard, specific mention is made of *memories of distressing experiences related to being parented and childhood experiences*. Mention is also made of *recollections of other personally distressing experiences from the mother's more recent past*. In this way, it appears that the mother projects her experience of distressing events from the past onto her children, imagining that they too may have similar experiences which cause them distress. Murray was particularly interested in projection as it was his understanding of an individual's tendency to project into surrounding objects and people some of the imagery associated with the need in operation at the time that informed the development of the TAT. Thus, Murray's theory supports the idea that a mother may project her needs relating to the experience of distressing events from the past onto her children.

Brazelton and Cramer (1990) note that projection is not necessarily detrimental to parent-child interactions, and instead, plays an important role in empathic processes. What is important is that the parent recognises similarities and differences between the parent and the child. Difficulties arise when parents are unaware of their own motivations and behaviours.

### **6.5.2 Conscious and unconscious needs**

The results indicated that in some instances the mother may be consciously aware of her need to parent in a way that does not repeat specific personal negative experiences, while in other instances, the process may be unconscious and out of the mother's awareness. Murray (1938) considered it important to distinguish needs that are relatively conscious, where the individual can report accurately upon the need, and those that are relatively unconscious, and an individual may have no awareness of the nature of the need.

### **6.5.3 Repeating the past**

As discussed, the results revealed that there are instances where the mother parents in a different manner to that of her own parents regarding areas where her own experience caused her distress. However, the results revealed there are also instances where the mother struggles, or is unable parent differently, and consequently repeats undesired behaviours. Moreover, the results showed that specific unresolved difficulties and insufficiently fulfilled needs within the mother's relationship with her own parents may shape parenting difficulties relating to struggles to avoid repeating negative experiences from her own past. Murray's theory offers some support for this finding. In accordance with psychodynamic thinking, Murray (1938) emphasised the influence of childhood experiences, and the way in which they influence the development of specific needs, believing that aspects of the past are always operating in the present. He was intent upon uncovering inhibited or unconscious tendencies and tracing current experience back to infantile experiences. He believed that a need does not usually become a dominant element of personality if there is no barrier to its fulfilment. Applying this notion, a particular need that may have been obstructed within the mother's relationship with her own parents could become a more consistent trait of personality, and may be dramatized within the mother-child relationship.

Although Murray's theory supports the significance of childhood experiences in shaping later experiences, dominant needs and behaviour, consideration is not given to specific scenarios

that may manifest within the mother-child relationship. However, Scharf and Shulman (2006) support the finding that a mother may repeat with her own children negative experiences from her past relating to the manner in which she was parented. The authors used case studies to demonstrate how parents may attempt to correct past experiences from their own personal experience of being parented in the way they parent, and how in many instances, they are unsuccessful in their attempts. The authors show how the parent may be unaware of the fact that they are repeating the type of parenting they experienced. Such unconscious compulsive repetitions can be perceived as a type of identification with the aggressor. In addition, the study by Fraiberg *et al.* (1975) revealed a repetition of mothers' own childhood conflicts in their interactions with their infants. According to Leerkes and Siepak (2006), merely wanting to parent differently from her own experience of being parented is not sufficient to protect a mother from the negative effects of her own childhood history. The authors propose that this is probably due to the fact that a mother may lack intervening relationships which promote a sense of being loved and provide a model of how to respond sensitively to others' emotions.

It is also noted that Murray (1938) deviated from Freud's ideas by allowing for influences beyond the parent-child interaction in shaping needs, experiences and behaviour. Although Murray did not explore how this notion translates into parenting, Cohler and Paul (2002) have considered this implication. The authors acknowledge the significance of the parent's past in influencing parent-child interaction, but caution against considering only how a parent's early conflicts may manifest in their own parenting. They stress that transformations taking place across the lifespan need to be taken into consideration, as the parent's responses to caregiving are formed within the parent's continuing life story. It is therefore important to consider the psychological needs of the mother, as expressed within the parent-child relationship, within the context of the mother's entire life experience, rather than focussing only on early childhood conflicts. In a similar vein, a study by Leerkes and Crockenberg (2006) reveals that although parenting history in childhood predicts subsequent parental behaviour and related cognitions and emotions, intervening experiences may change the nature of these associations for some mothers.

#### **6.5.4 The variety of thema and the complexity of parenting**

Owing to the variety of past experiences among the participants, as well as the variety of needs that were evoked and the numerous behavioural manifestations of different needs,

different *thema* can be identified among the participants relating to parenting in a manner that does not replicate negative experiences from the mother's past. For example, an environmental press of unavailable parents may activate the need for relatedness, which may manifest as the mother showing physical affection to her children, or it might manifest as the mother spending time assisting with homework. An environmental press of an insecure home environment activates the need for a sense of security and control, which may manifest as the mother taking great care to manage the children's home environment. In this way, the results highlight the variety and the complexity of parent-child interactions.

Although Murray (1938) did not comment specifically on how different needs find expression within the parent-child relationship, his focus was upon uncovering various underlying and interrelated needs, exploring how they manifest in behaviour, and how the broader environment has shaped the development of specific needs. Furthermore, Murray (1938) emphasised the complexity of human experience and behaviour. Considering that there are numerous influences from childhood that can influence the development of various specific needs within the parent, and that these needs may interact and find numerous forms of expression within the parent-child relationship, it can be expected that the results showed various and different *thema* among the participants. As such, the findings are supported by Murray's appreciation for the complexity and variety of human experience and behaviour.

#### **6.5.5 The interpretive nature of the findings**

The results showed that a mother's needs may appear to be associated at first glance with aspects of childhood outside of the parent-child relationship, but on further consideration, may be interconnected with unfulfilled needs within the parent-child relationship. This finding highlights the difficulty of tracing needs, and how identifying needs is an intuitive, interpretive process. In addition, the finding draws attention once again to the significance of early childhood relationship with one's parents in terms of shaping behaviour and experience. This finding is supported by Murray (1938), who acknowledges the difficulty of tracing and identifying needs as well as the interpretive nature of the process.

## **6.6 Not wanting the child to be the perpetrator of an experience that has been distressing for the mother**

An additional theme that emerged was that a mother may aim to parent in a manner that inhibits a child from causing distress to others. The mother's specific concerns appear to be interconnected with experiences that were personally distressing for her, and seem to express unfulfilled needs relating to the distressing experience. More specifically, potential similarities between perpetrators of distress from the mother's past may be projected onto her children. For instance, a son may be perceived as potentially being like his father or grandfather. This finding is supported by Brazelton and Cramer (1990). The authors propose that parents tend to transfer their own past experiences onto the child through three forms of projection (see section 3.4.1). One type of projection involves the child representing a significant person from the parent's past. Integrating this idea with Murray's theory of needs (Murray, 1938; Murray & Shneidman, 1981) suggests that a child may represent a significant person from the parent's past, and the mother may assume that the child will either fulfil and/or thwart her needs in the same manner as the person from her past.

This process seemed to apply to the one of the participants, who appeared to project an image of her father or ex-husband onto her son, assuming that he might not be supportive to a potential partner. In this way, the mother expressed needs related to an unresolved conflict in her desire that her son would someday be a supportive husband. It appears that an integration of Murray's theory of needs (Murray, 1938; Murray & Shneidman, 1981) and the conceptualisation of projection within the parent-child relationship (Brazelton & Cramer, 1990) supports the finding that a mother may be expressing needs related to a prior experience through her desire for her children not to perpetrate an experience that was distressing for her. "

## **6.7 Evoking and resolving prior conflicts: The satisfaction of addressing unfulfilled needs though parenting**

The results revealed that as a mother witnesses different stages within her child's life, these stages and events may evoke the mother's recollections of her experiences at this stage when she was a child. In this way, a mother's unfulfilled needs from childhood may re-emerge as her children pass through the related transition. Murray (1938) did not specifically consider this phenomenon. However, Benedek (1959) supports the finding that different stages and

events within the child's life may evoke the mother's recollections of related experiences. The author proposes that in each 'critical period' of the child's development, the child revives the parent's related developmental conflicts. Benedek's view forms the basis of much of the discussion of parenthood from a psychodynamic perspective to this day (Cohler & Paul, 2002).

The findings also revealed that a mother may become aware of how recollections of her own experiences as a child are evoked through witnessing her children's experiences, and she may recognize the unconscious process of projection within her relationship with her children. She may perceive that she has been trying to amend some of the hurts from her past through her children, and her recognition that her children are not experiencing similar struggles brings feelings of joy and relief. In this way, the results showed that evoking the mother's recollections of her own experiences does not necessarily translate into pathological parent-child processes. Rather, a mother may recognise that her children are not experiencing similar struggles. This finding is supported by Manzano, Espasa, and Zilkha (1999) in their presentation of the concept of the narcissistic scenarios of parenthood. According to the authors, the narcissistic aspect of the parent-child relationship, which exists in all parent-child relationships, refers to the manner in which the parent views the child as a self-representation. The narcissistic aspect of the relationship co-exists with a relationship where the child is regarded and loved as a separate being. It is only in instances where the narcissistic element is too dominant, that the parent fails to sufficiently regard and love the child as a separate individual.

Benedek (1959) also supports this finding, indicating that different stages and events within the child's life evoke the mother's recollections of the mother's related experiences and that this either stimulates problematic manifestations in the parent, or resolution of the conflict and a greater level of integration. Benedek (1959) proposes that normal mothering involves working through primary conflicts with one's own mother, and that the process facilitates the resolution of those conflicts. In a similar vein, Cowan (1992) maintain that becoming a family provides a challenge for some men and women that may lead to their growth as individuals, as couples and as parents.

## **6.8 The child as an extension of the mother and the need for recognition, affirmation and achievement**

The results revealed that a mother may fulfil her need for recognition, affirmation and achievement by witnessing her children's perceived valuable attributes, and witnessing others speak of her children in a positive light. In this way, a mother may vicariously fulfil her own needs. While Murray does not refer specifically to the vicarious experience of need fulfilment, Freud (1914/1953) supports this finding, proposing that parents need to view their child as perfect, as this provides the parent with an enhanced sense of self-worth. Freud proposed that love for one's child is a form of self-regard, and adds that the parent identifies with the child's personal attainments which the parents had desired for themselves.

Kohut and Wolf (1978), building on Freud (1914/1953), suggest that it is difficult to care for another unless the parent experiences self-love or self-regard. In a similar vein, Cohler and Paul (2002) highlight how the term narcissism tends to have overly negative connotations in psychoanalysis. The authors propose that rather than working to the detriment of the child, the hopes and expectations of the parents form the basis for concern for the child, and that it is only in extreme instances that parents place excessive emphasis on their offspring's accomplishments to the detriment of their wellbeing.

The results also showed that a mother may believe that parents view their children as an extension of themselves. Support for the mother's perception is offered by Manzano, Espasa, and Zilkha (1999). The authors put forward their concept of narcissistic scenarios of parenthood, which refers to the way in which all parents, in varying degrees, view the child as a representation of themselves. It is noted that the authors consider narcissistic scenarios to be largely unconscious; however, the results show that a mother may, in certain instances, be aware of some narcissistic processes, such as the way in which the need for affirmation and esteem may manifest in the mother-child relationship.

## **6.9 Spiritual and religious beliefs**

The results revealed that subconscious emotional needs may unconsciously shape a mother's spiritual convictions, which in turn shape parent-child interaction. More specifically, a mother's spiritual belief that life unfolds as it is supposed to, may reflect a need for security and protection, and these needs and belief may shape experience within the mother-child



relationship. There is a dearth of academic literature on the influence of religion on parenting (Frosh, 2004). Nevertheless, there is some evidence suggesting the significance of religious influences (e.g. Mahoney, Pargament, Tarakeshwar, & Swank, 2002; Wilcox, 1997). To the researcher's knowledge, there are no studies exploring the interconnections between emotional needs, spiritual beliefs and parenting. Although Murray (1938) does not comment specifically upon religion or spiritual beliefs in relation to his theory of needs, traditional psychodynamic theory proposes that religious beliefs are the expression of wish-fulfilment in response to feelings of helplessness (Fontana, 2003). More specifically, it is proposed that the frightening experience of helplessness in childhood arouses the need for protection, which may be provided by the child's father. This feeling of helplessness endures throughout life and makes it necessary for adults to cling to the existence of a father in the form of a powerful god. In this way, religion can be perceived as fulfilling the need for protection.

The results of the study indicated that a mother's spiritual beliefs concerning the importance of not intruding on a child's life may reflect the mother's need for respect, autonomy and protection of boundaries. As such, the results go beyond traditional psychoanalytic formulations of religious beliefs by highlighting how specific experiences from a mother's past relationships may activate particular needs that inform a particular spiritual viewpoint. This finding is supported by more recent attachment theory and psychoanalytic conceptualisations of religion (e.g. Jones, 2002; Kirkpatrick, 2005). Jones (2002) proposes that the relational history of an individual resonates in the spiritual beliefs that are held and ideals that are espoused. Although there appears to be no research on the interconnections between needs, spiritual beliefs and parenting, a consideration of research on both the influence of religion upon parenting and attachment theory and psychoanalytic conceptualisations of spiritual beliefs, offers support to the findings of this study in relation to religious beliefs and the needs of the mother.

#### **6.10 Replicating positive experiences**

The findings of the study revealed that a mother may attempt to replicate experiences for her children that she herself has experienced as pleasurable. In these instances, it seems that the mother is not motivated by a desire to address an insufficiently fulfilled need of her own, but parents in a manner that provides sources of pleasure for her children. Applying Murray's concept of activity needs (Murray, 1938), it appears that a mother projects her experience of

fulfilled activity needs onto her children, and gains need satisfaction through experiencing her children's pleasure. Support for the finding that a mother may actively work to replicate positive experiences for her children is offered by Harkness, Super, and Keefer (1992). The authors propose that one of the ways in which parenting is influenced by experiences from childhood involves parents identifying positive aspects of their childhood, and trying to deliberately replicate the positive aspects for their own children.

In this chapter the results of the study were discussed in relation to the theory of needs of Murray (1938) and with reference to further relevant research. The next chapter discusses the results of the research in light of the study's strengths and limitations, and considers recommendations for future research.



## CHAPTER 7

### RECOMMENDATIONS AND CRITICAL REVIEW

In this chapter, the results of the research are discussed in light of the study's strengths and limitations. In addition, recommendations for future research and personal reflections are considered.

#### 7.1 Strengths of the study

The study succeeded in its aim to explore mothering within the context of psychological needs. The interviews yielded text which provided insight into the way in which a mother's psychological needs may be dramatized within the parent-child relationship. This enabled the researcher to develop a better understanding of the complex dynamics that are involved in parenting in the three cases discussed, and the way in which the mother's needs may influence parenting within a specific context. The three-phase interview process was particularly suitable for the exploration, as the structure enabled each participant to reconstruct her experience within the context of their lives, thereby increasing the validity of the study.

An extensive literature search revealed no other studies exploring the way in which specific needs from Murray's (1938) taxonomy of needs may be dramatized within the mother-child relationship. In this way, the study contributes to an understanding of the complexity of parenting processes, and the manner in which needs may find expression within parenting interactions. The study may stimulate further thought regarding which needs may motivate different parenting experiences and behaviour, the unconscious processes which may be at work within mother-child interactions, and whether dominant needs of the mother can be traced to past experiences. This may assist clinicians in better understanding parenting processes and consequently enhance their ability to provide empathy and insight in the therapeutic relationship.

## 7.2 Limitations of the study

The discussion of the limitations of the study is organized according to the following headings: qualitative methodology, capturing and identifying subconscious needs, the complexity of parenting, and researcher bias.

Qualitative methodology is located within a particular paradigm. A reader from a scientific-empiricist paradigm may criticise this study, since the small number of participants means that the results cannot be generalised to a larger population, or more specifically, mothers. However, the principal aim of the research was to understand the complexity of the mothers' experience, and was not to ensure the representativeness of findings.

A limitation of the research concerns the difficulty in capturing and identifying conscious needs as well as implicit, unconscious needs from the interview texts. Although the text did uncover unconscious needs, in the main the interviews revealed explicit or self-attributed desires, and reflected the participants' self-awareness of conscious needs. The researcher would have liked the study to have offered more insight into unconscious needs and associated processes related to parenting.

A further limitation is that the study relied on interviews and self-reports, which although providing rich descriptions, can evoke bias towards socially desirable responses. In this way, some insight into how the participants' needs manifest within the mother-child relationship may have been lost.

The researcher recognises that by focussing specifically upon the way in which the emotional needs of the mother manifest within the parent-child relationship, the study is at risk of being reductionistic and of simplifying the complexities of parenting. The researcher attempted to minimise this risk by exploring the multiple and reciprocal influences which shape parenting and integrating the relevant theory in this regard with the research findings.

A further limitation concerns the possibility that the researcher may have projected her own framework of understanding onto the text, thus limiting interpretation. It is noted that the interpretation of underlying needs is a highly subjective process. There is the possibility that

the researcher imposed interpretations and patterns on the text, although every effort was made to remain receptive and unbiased.

### **7.3 Recommendations and implications for future research**

The current study provides a glimpse into the possible manifestations of the way in which the needs of the mother manifest within the parent-child relationship. Further research is needed to explore the various and complex expressions of different needs in this regard. Although the interviews with three participants provided insight into the phenomenon, repeating the research study with more participants would increase the breadth of understanding offered.

Future studies could explore needs and parenting by using alternative methods, such as by using projective tests and behavioural observations to ascertain unconscious needs. Further research on unconscious processes is recommended in order to gain greater insight into underlying processes regarding parenting. It is also suggested that future research uses a longitudinal design, whereby interviews with the offspring of the mothers are included in the study. The offspring could be interviewed on reaching adulthood, with the aim of exploring their perceptions of how their mother's needs may have been dramatized within the mother-child relationship.

It is recognised that the research emphasises the role of mothers, and neglects fathers and other care-givers. In addition, the participants were educated, white, middle-class women within a particular age bracket. As such, the diversity among the participants was limited. It is suggested that additional research uses a more heterogeneous selection of participants.

Regarding specific areas of focus relating to needs, it may be important to explore whether there are similarities and differences in the manifestation of the mother's need for relatedness associated with whether the need is predominantly experienced as an approaching need (e.g. drawn towards joy and pleasure), as opposed to being experienced as avoidant need (e.g. a flight from the anxiety of being alone). It may also be important to consider processes concerning the need for relatedness in the instances where parents do not sufficiently protect and nurture their children. Building on this idea, an area of investigation may be to further explore underlying processes regarding to the need for relatedness where the attachment relationship is impaired, and the mother is not powerfully attracted to the child and does not seek proximity and a sense of closeness within the mother-child relationship.

It is also noted that there appear to be no studies exploring the interconnections between the parent's emotional needs, spiritual beliefs and parenting, as well as the connections between the gender of the child and the emotional needs of the parent. Further exploration within these areas would provide additional insight into the parent-child relationship.

#### **7.4 Concluding remark**

While reflecting on the research process, I feel a profound appreciation for the participants in the study who shared their experiences of a deeply personal process. It is hoped that some of the uniqueness of each mother's experience has been conveyed in this work.

*"Being a mother is learning about strengths you didn't know you had,  
and dealing with fears you didn't know existed."*

*(Wooten, n.d.)*

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## APPENDIX A

### MURRAY'S PSYCHOGENIC NEEDS

<i>Psychogenic need</i>	<i>Description of need</i>
<b>Abasement</b>	To submit passively to external force. To surrender and accept punishment.
<b>Achievement</b>	To overcome obstacles and succeed.
<b>Acquisition</b>	To obtain possessions.
<b>Affiliation</b>	To make associations and friendships. To draw near and enjoyably cooperate or reciprocate with an allied other.
<b>Aggression</b>	To injure others.
<b>Autonomy</b>	To resist others and stand strong. To be independent and free to act according to impulse.
<b>Blameavoidance</b>	To avoid blame and obey the rules.
<b>Construction</b>	To build or create.
<b>Contrariance</b>	To be unique.
<b>Counteraction</b>	To defend honour.
<b>Defendance</b>	To justify actions.
<b>Deference</b>	To follow a superior, to serve.
<b>Dominance</b>	To control and lead others.
<b>Exhibition</b>	To attract attention.
<b>Exposition</b>	To provide information, educate.
<b>Harm avoidance</b>	To avoid pain.
<b>Infavoidance</b>	To avoid failure, shame, or to conceal a weakness.
<b>Nurturance</b>	To protect the helpless. To support, console, comfort and heal.
<b>Order</b>	To arrange, organise, and be precise.
<b>Play</b>	To relieve tension, have fun, or relax.
<b>Recognition</b>	To gain approval and social status.
<b>Rejection</b>	To exclude another.
<b>Sentience</b>	To enjoy sensuous impressions.
<b>Sex</b>	To form and enjoy an erotic relationship.
<b>Similance</b>	To empathise.
<b>Succorance</b>	To seek protection or sympathy.
<b>Understanding</b>	To analyse and experience, to seek knowledge.

(Adapted from Murray, 1938, pp. 80-83)



## APPENDIX B



### **Information and consent form**

#### **Dear Participant**

As a senior student at the University of Johannesburg, I would like to invite you to be a participant in a research project which forms a part of my Masters of Arts degree in Psychology. The research I will be conducting explores parenting from a mother's perspective.

If you are prepared to participate in this study, you will be required to take part in three separate interviews that will be spaced approximately a week apart. In the initial interview, we will explore your life history, giving particular attention to your childhood. The aim of the first interview is to provide context to the subsequent sessions by exploring your life prior to becoming a parent. In sessions two and three we will look specifically at your experience of being a parent. Each interview will not exceed one hour. The sessions will be a week apart to allow you time to reflect on the preceding interview. The interviews will be recorded on audiotape and transcribed verbatim. The audio cassette recording will be kept in a safe place at all times.

Participation is voluntary, and no part of your biographical information will be published, made available to other sources, or used in the research study itself. You may decline to answer certain questions, and may insist on answering some questions "off record".

I would like to thank you for your time and effort, and look forward to working with you.

## CONSENT FORM

### DECLARATION BY THE PARTICIPANT

I, the undersigned,

\_\_\_\_\_

of \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ (address) with contact number \_\_\_\_\_

acknowledge that:

1. I have been invited by the researcher to partake in this study.
2. The purpose and procedures of this project have been clearly explained to me.
3. The number of hours required for participation in the study has been indicated.
4. I have been informed that the interviews will be recorded on audiotape and transcribed verbatim.
5. I have been informed that the information obtained will be confidential and that anonymity will be ensured, but that the information I provide will be used in the thesis as a requirement for the researcher's Master of Arts in Psychology.
6. I have been informed that I can refuse to take part in this study, and can withdraw participation at any time.
7. I will not incur any additional cost by taking part in this project.
8. I agree, without any coercion, to participate in this study.

Signed (day) \_\_\_\_\_ 2009

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Signature)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Witness)

**DECLARATION BY THE RESEARCHER**

I, \_\_\_\_\_ declare that:

1. The information presented in this document has been explained to the participant  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. I have asked the participant whether she has any questions or needs further clarification.

Signed (day) \_\_\_\_\_ 2009

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Signature)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Witness)



## APPENDIX C

### Interview schedule

#### First interview

*The aim of the first interview is to explore early experiences relating to psychological needs and parenting.*

Tell me about your childhood.

What did you want as a child? What were your dominant needs?

How did you get what you wanted?

What led you to have children?

What experiences from childhood shaped how you think about parenting?

#### Second interview



*The second interview allows the participants to consider their parenting processes and psychological needs within the current context.*

What is it like for you to be a parent?

How would you describe your relationship with your children?

What do you want for yourself and for your children?

#### Third interview

*The third interview encourages the participants to reflect on their experience of parenting and how their psychological needs manifest within parenting practices, beliefs and attitudes.*

Given what you have said about your life before you became a parent, and given what you say about being a parent, how do you understand your personal parenting practices and beliefs?

What sense does it make to you?

How do your psychological needs manifest in terms of parenting practices?